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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 8 FEBRUARY 2026 | SUNDAY | BENGALURU | 19 SHABAN, 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 36 | Pages: 8

INDIA, US UNVEIL INTERIM TRADE PACT

Trump slashes tariffs to 18%; Deal opens $30 trillion market

IMPHAL, 4 FEB

India and the US on Saturday announced they have reached a framework for an interim trade agreement under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost two-way trade.

While the US will reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the present 50 per cent, India will eliminate or cut down import duties on all US industrial goods and a wide range of American food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains, red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits.

According to a joint statement issued, India has expressed its intention to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products and coking coal over the next five years.

Further, through an executive order, US President Donald Trump has removed the 25 per cent tariffs, or additional import duty, that it imposed on India in August last year for purchasing Russian oil, claiming that New Delhi has committed to stopping importing oil from Moscow.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the interim pact will open a USD 30 trillion market for Indian exporters, especially MSMEs, farmers and fishermen, dismissing backlash that the agricultural sector would be hurt.

This framework will now be converted into a legal pact, which is expected to be signed by mid-March, following which India will start cutting down duties on specified goods.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the interim trade pact will strengthen 'Make in India' by opening up new opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs, and create jobs for women and youngsters.

The reduction in tariffs will help boost exports of India's labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, plastic and rubber, organic chemicals, home decor, artisanal products and certain machinery.

Additionally, tariffs will go down to zero on a wide range of goods, including generic pharmaceuticals, gems and diamonds. The two sides are looking to seal a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). —*PTI*

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Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal during a press conference on the India-US trade deal, at Vanijya Bhawan, in New Delhi, on Saturday —*PTI*

THE 'FATHER OF ALL DEALS'

The BJP has termed the US-India agreement as the 'father of all trade deal'. Here's what the deal entails:

No duty concessions on agri and dairy goods, including maize, wheat, rice, soya, poultry, milk, cheese, ethanol (fuel), tobacco, certain vegetables and meat. This is to safeguard the interest of Indian farmers.

Walnuts, almonds, pistachios, and some lentils will be imported duty free from US.

Tariffs slashed from **150%** to **30%** on US whiskey.

Zero-duty access to with engine capacities of **800-1,600 cc.** This will benefit makers such as Harley-Davidson.

India will buy $500 billion worth of goods from the US, including energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products and coking coal, over the next 5 years.

The US will now monitor whether India is importing oil from Russia or not. If the US decides India has imported Russian oil directly or indirectly, the extra 25 per cent tariff penalty is back. This is truly extraordinary. And the Modi govt has accepted it

-Jairam Ramesh, Congress communications in-charge

Farmers' bodies slam trade deal, announce protest

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Several farmer organisations, including the SKM, criticised the India-US trade deal on Saturday and said protests against it will be held across the country on 12 February, as part of the general strike. They termed the deal anti-farmer and said that they would burn effigies of US President Donald Trump and PM Narendra Modi. —*PTI*

3 convicted in Hampi gangrape, murder

GANGAVATHI, 7 FEB

A Koppal district court in Karnataka has convicted three men—Mallesh, Sai, and Sharanappa for the gang rape of two women, including an Israeli tourist, and the murder of a male tourist near Hampi. The attack occurred on 6 March, 2025 near the Tungabhadra Left Bank Canal at Sanapura. —*PTI*

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Andhra launches Amaravati Quantum Valley

AMARAVATI, 7 FEB

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu laid the foundation stone for the Amaravati Quantum Valley (AQV) at Uddandarayunipalem, aiming to establish the state as a global hub for quantum research and innovation. Accompanied by Union Minister Jitendra Singh, Naidu emphasised the valley's focus on quantum medicine, biology, and multi-disciplinary, data-driven sciences. —*PTI*

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BJP's Ritu Tawde set to be Mumbai's 1st woman Mayor

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

BJP corporator Ritu Tawde is set to become Mumbai's mayor in an unopposed contest after Shiv Sena (UBT) decided not to field a challenger, ending the Thackeray family's 25-year dominance of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. Tawde's elevation marks the BJP's return to the mayor's post after 44 years. The Shiv Sena, led by Eknath Shinde, nominated Sanjay Ghadi for deputy mayor. With only one nomination each for the two posts, the election, scheduled for 11 February, will be a formality. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Centre has put Metro fare hike on hold: Tejasvi

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya said that Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has instructed official to temporarily put on hold the proposed Namma Metro fare hike in the City.

The fare hike was set to take effect from 9 February, with ticket prices set to rise by Rs 1 to Rs 5 across 10 zones, with charges adjusted according to travel distances throughout the network. The 5 per cent hike comes after a steep increase last year.

Surya said the Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs also assured a personal review of anomalies in the Fare Fixation Committee (FFC) and added that a fresh committee could be considered if the State government requests it.

The BJP leader said on X on Saturday that he spoke to Khattar on the phone over the "unjust Bengaluru metro fare hike".

Surya noted that Bengaluru already has the costliest metro fares in India, and another hike would make public transport unaffordable for lakhs of citizens.

"The question now is simple: Will the State government act in the citizens' interest or hide behind lies again? Chief Minister Siddaramaiah must act at once, formally initiate the process to constitute a new FFC, and facilitate early rationalisation of fares" he asked.

The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) on Thursday had said that Metro fares would be revised on a zone-by-zone basis starting as part of its annual automatic fare adjustment system. It said it was bound by the FFC recommendations

Following the announcement, a blame game commenced. The Congress said that the Centre controlled the FFC, while the BJP claimed that wasn't the case.

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also in charge of Bengaluru Development, said he would discuss the matter with BMRCL authorities. "They have not consulted us. They have the authority. The Central government Secretary is the Chairman of the Fare Fixation Committee, and he has made the decision."

He said he would review the matter soon. —*PTI*

The fares were set to be hiked between Rs 1 to Rs 5 across 10 zones from 9 February —*PTI*

JAB AT PAK?

US releases map showing PoK, Aksai Chin in India

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The US Trade Representative's Office has released a map demarcating Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir as part of India. It also depicted Aksai Chin, a region claimed by China, within India.

In the past, maps released by the US government or the state department often marked Pakistan-occupied Kashmir separately, largely in line with Islamabad's position.

The map, shared on social media, signals Washington's support for India's political map and backs India's territorial claims.

Despite US interests in Pakistan's rare earth minerals and defence sales, Washington has made it clear that it does not accept Islamabad's territorial claims. The broader message is that Pakistan remains on the US radar, but India's strategic and economic importance outweighs other regional concerns. Many analysts see the move as a diplomatic setback for Islamabad.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of External Affairs dismissed Pakistan's claims that New Delhi was tied to the suicide blast that killed 36 people in Islamabad. —*Agencies*

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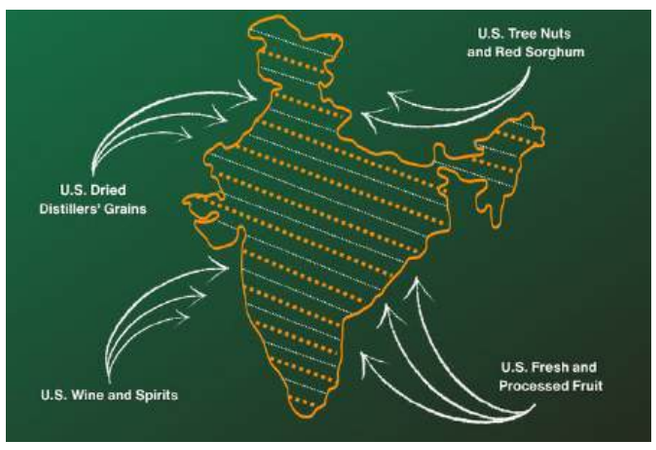

The map was released by US Trade Representative's Office

— US TRADE REPRESENTATIVE'S OFFICE

Rijiju claims 40-50 MPs threatened Birla before PM's speech

PATNA, 7 FEB

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Kiren Rijiju, on Saturday said that "40-50 Opposition MPs" had stormed the chamber of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and spoken "in a nasty way" ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled speech in the House.

"We realised that they were itching to create trouble and it would be better if the Prime Minister stayed away," he added.

Rijiju, who was addressing a press conference at the BJP's Bihar headquarters, also said that he was present inside Birla's chamber when the exchange took place and a decision was, therefore, taken that PM should not come to speak in the Lok Sabha as scheduled.

"We are in power and have sufficient numerical strength. We could have muscled our way through the proceedings by making use of marshals. But we did not want to do that. And therefore, we found a way around the problem," Rijiju said when asked about Modi's much talked about absence in the debate on Motion of Thanks to President's address, which was supposed to conclude after the PM's speech.

Rijiju pointed out that the PM did speak at length in the Rajya Sabha. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

5 cheetahs born in Kuno, total now 35

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Saturday announced the birth of five cheetah cubs at Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, marking a major boost for Project Cheetah. The cubs were born to Aasha, a Namibian cheetah, on 7 February, raising the number of surviving India-born cubs to 24 and taking the country's total cheetah population to 35.

Sharing the news on X, Yadav praised the efforts of field staff and veterinarians, calling the development a proud milestone in India's cheetah conservation journey. He said the project has now reached the third India-born generation of cheetahs, underscoring the success of the world's first intercontinental translocation of an extinct wild species.

—*PTI*

The Minister also confirmed that a new batch of cheetahs from Botswana is expected to arrive by the end of February. Earlier, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said eight cheetahs would be brought to the state. —*ANI*

KIN BLAMES WATER

Man dies 40 days after wife killed in Indore water contamination

BHOPAL, 7 FEB

The Bhagirathpura locality of Madhya Pradesh's Indore, reeling under a diarrhoea outbreak triggered by the consumption of contaminated water, has registered yet another death in less than 45 days, as a 70-year-old man succumbed on Thursday during treatment. The man's wife was among the dozens who died during the outbreak.

The deceased, Algu Chaudhary, was reportedly admitted to the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences (SAIMS-Indore) Hospital on 9 January, after bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea. He reportedly also developed respiratory complications and died while undergoing treatment late on Thursday night.

The deceased man's son, Sanjay, claimed that the septuagenarian suffered from no comorbidities or had no prior medical problems.

"My father was admitted to the hospital following bouts of diarrhoea and vomiting after drinking contaminated water," he said.

The Indore district chief health and medical officer Dr Madhav Hassani, however, claimed that the septuagenarian Chaudhary didn't die due to diarrhoea or dehydration-related health complications.

"The patient was suffering from bleeding in the brain and had complications due to that," he said. —*Agencies*

Trust is our strongest currency: PM in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, 7 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted trust as India's strongest currency during his two-day visit to Malaysia, emphasising the country's recent trade agreements with the UK, US, EU, and others. Addressing a community programme, Modi said, "Trust has become India's strongest currency," citing deals with nations including the UAE, Australia, New Zealand, Oman, and the US.

He also announced a new consulate in Malaysia and the Thiruvalluvar Scholarship for students to study in India. Modi praised the Indian diaspora in Malaysia, the second-largest globally, mainly of Tamil origin, and stressed Tamil's global significance. "Tamil is India's gift to the world," he said, recalling India's Vice President and ministers from Tamil Nadu.

"Inspired by this history, we will establish the Tiruvalluvar Centre in Malaysia to strengthen our shared heritage." Modi's visit also included the launch of UPI transactions in Malaysia, further boosting economic ties.

He expressed delight that India's success is Malaysia's success, emphasising the partnership's impact.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim acknowledged the deep historical ties, stating, "India is among Malaysia's top trading partners." —*PTI*

Time will answer: DKS on when he will become CM

High Command has no reason to replace Siddaramaiah: HM

MANGALURU/ MYSURU, 7 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said time will answer as to when he will become Chief Minister. However, Home Minister G Parameshwara said the High Command has no reason to replace Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Asked by reporters in Mangaluru on Saturday if he will become Chief Minister after the State Budget, Shivakumar said: "Time will answer".

Siddaramaiah, who also hold the finance portfolio, has repeatedly asserted that he will present his record 17th Budget as the CM. The Budget is expected to be presented in March. Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah have allegedly been locked in a power tussle for the top post.

However, Shivakumar asserted that he will abide by Congress High Command's decision.

"People, legislators, you (media), and everyone have the desire, but we should all abide by what the party says," Shivakumar said.

Responding to a question about some dalit organisations demanding that Home Minister G Parameshwara should become the CM, during his visit to Chikkamagaluru, he said, "what's wrong in it?"

Parameshwara, meanwhile, said Siddaramaiah will be the Chief Minister until the High Command decides that there is a need for a change.

"The High Command is watching everything," he said in Mysuru. "When they feel there is a need, they will decide. They may be of the opinion that there is no such situation now, hence they have not said anything so far on the issue".

Asked whether Siddaramaiah will be the CM for a full five-year term, he said, "Who made Siddaramaiah the CM? It is the High Command, and until the High Command says that Siddaramaiah will remain in the post".

The power tussle had heated up over an alleged power sharing agreement between Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah. According to reports, Shivakumar would become the Chief Minister after the party completed two-and-a-half years in power.

—Salar News with Agencies

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar *–PTI*

No power sharing pact: Parameshwara

There has been no discussion about power sharing of the Chief Minister's post at the party High Command level, HM G Parameshwara said. There are no questions about its implementation, he added. No legislators have raised the issue during the recent CLP meeting either.

'STATE HAMPERING LAND ACQUISITION'

Premium B'luru-Mumbai train service soon: Vaishnaw

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that a premium train service from Bengaluru to Mumbai will start "very soon".

He said on Saturday that Karnataka has received a record Rs 7,748 crore in this year's railway Budget -- nine times the allocation during the Congress-led UPA government, and the total railway investment in the State is Rs 52,950 crore.

"Massive investment will cover track creation, station redevelopment, safety, announcements, Bengaluru suburban and many new projects in Karnataka," he told reporters here.

Vaishnaw said, "(Bengaluru South MP) Tejasvi (Surya) had come for that, and many other requests had also come. Many sections are getting doubled, so very soon we'll have many more services."

On the Vande Bharat train from Bengaluru to Mangaluru, he said, "Now, the testing, certifications are going on for electrification."

On land acquisition, Vaishnaw said the Centre continues to seek the State's support as land is a State subject.

"We continuously pursue the State government for land acquisition in many projects. We believe in cooperative federalism," he said. "I don't want to get into the blame game."

On the proposed bullet train corridors linking Bengaluru with Chennai and Hyderabad, announced in the Union Budget, Vaishnaw said that it will "connect the three large economies of South Indian states. They will become the high-speed diamonds of South India".

He said work on the Bengaluru suburban rail has gained progress after a railway officer was appointed Managing Director of K-RIDE. "We have the tender documents prepared. We have got the approvals which are required for designing a complex system, like a suburban system, almost more than half is elevated."

Calling the Yesvantpur-Kolar line important, he claimed that the State government had withdrawn their support. "We will be requesting the State government to support it, because Bengaluru development is very important. We must double the capacity of Bengaluru." *—PTI*

BJP leader R Ashoka, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and State BJP President BY Vijayendra in the City on Saturday *-MOHAMMED ASAD*

- NMassive investment will cover track creation, station redevelopment, safety, announcements, Bengaluru suburban and many new projects in Karnataka," Vaishnaw said.

BJP, Cong spar over temple foundation laying event

BIDAR, 7 FEB

A dispute between the Congress and BJP intensified over the foundation-laying ceremony for the renovation works at the Papanash Temple here after BJP district head accused Congress district minister of re-inaugurating the work for which the Prime Minister had laid the foundation earlier.

Former Union Minister Bhagwanth Khuba said he had made efforts to secure 23 crore grant for the development of the historic temple under the PRASHAD scheme. He objected to the fresh foundation-laying event on 7 February by district in-charge minister Eshwar Khandre and sitting MP Sagar Khandre.

In a bid to cool down the frayed tempers, Deputy Commissioner Shilpa Sharma clarified that the foundation laying for the project had already been done by the Prime Minister and that the district in-charge minister would only inaugurate the commencement of the works on 7 February.

Accordingly, a programme to launch the renovation works was organised in the Papanash temple area. At the same time, BJP workers, led by district president Somanath Patil and former Union Minister Bhagwanth Khuba, attempted to offer prayers to the Shiva lingam at the Papanash Temple.

However, as a precautionary measure in view of the possibility of tension, the police stopped them at the gate of the temple.

Over the past few days, Congress workers had put up banners across the city in connection with the programme. The BJP had questioned this and warned of protests.

PM Narendra Modi had virtually laid the foundation stone for the project in January 2024. *—Salar News*

A rally over the foundation ceremony of the Papanash Temple in Bidar, on Saturday *–SALAR NEWS*

VOICES AGAINST SIR

A group of volunteers protest against 'Special Intensive Revision' (SIR) order by Election Commission of India at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Saturday. They urged the Karnataka State government to not allow it until the Supreme Court issues verdict regarding its constitutionality. The apex court is currently hearing a slew of cases about the process in states such as West Bengal, Kerala and Bihar *-MOHAMMED ASAD*

3 convicted for Hampi gangrape, murder

MYSURU, 7 FEB

A court in Koppal district has convicted all the three accused in the gangrape of two women, including a foreign national, and the killing of a male tourist near Hampi.

The court is scheduled to pronounce the sentence on 16 February, after hearing the convicts, police sources said.

The incident occurred in March last year, near the Tungabhadra Left Bank Canal in Sanapura, close to world heritage site Hampi.

The three who had been convicted had approached the two women survivors, an Israeli tourist and a home stay operator, and three other male tourist friends on the night of 6 March, 2025, demanding money, police said.

When the money was denied, the trio allegedly attacked by pushing three men tourists into the canal and sexually assaulted the two women.

Two men among those pushed into the canal had managed to swim to safety, while a tourist from Odisha had drowned in the canal.

The court on Friday convicted Mallesh, Sai and Sharanappa for offences, including murder, gangrape, rape, attempt to murder, and robbery, under the relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), police said. The accused were physically produced before the court, they said.

The case had shocked the State, drawing national and international condemnation. Tourist bookings fell after the incident. *—PTI*

Case filed after meat packet found near Ballari temple

BALLARI, 7 JAN

A case has been registered after a meat packet was found on the premises of the Bala Veeranjaneya Temple in the Nagalakere area of Ballari, triggering concern among local residents. The packet was discovered near the Garuda idol of the Venkatesh Temple located within the temple complex. Police are investigating whether the meat was dragged to the spot by a dog or cat or deliberately placed by miscreants. Temple priest Mahesh Sharma noticed the packet around 5.30 am on Friday when he arrived for morning rituals and alerted local residents, following which police were informed. Personnel from the Cowl Bazaar Police Station, along with IGP P. S. Harsha, ASP Ravikumar and DySP Nandareddy, visited the site and conducted an inspection. A forensic science laboratory team also examined the spot, and police security has been tightened in the area around Ballari temple. *—Salar News*

Won't allow State to turn into 'Udta Punjab': HM

MYSURU, 7 FEB

We won't allow Karnataka to become like 'Udta Punjab' Home Minister G Parameshwara said after inaugurating the Siddartha Nagar police station in Mysuru on Saturday.

'Udta Punjab' is a 2016 Bollywood film staring Shahid Kapoor and Alia Bhatt about a drug crisis in Punjab.

Parameshwar said police are taking strict action to curb the drug menace, with regular checks at vulnerable points, including Bengaluru.

He said foreign nationals involved in drug cases are deported after legal formalities, as per rules.

On the recent Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) raids in Mysuru, Parameswara said state police and the central agency gave contradictory statements, adding that police must intensify probes into chemical factories.

NCB officials have detected the presence of 27 chemical manufacturing units in Rajasthan.

To boost surveillance, Mysuru city police are directed to install 2,000 CCTV cameras, including AI-enabled ones, after the formation of the Greater Mysuru City Corporation. Currently, 386 cameras are in place. *—PTI*

Farmers' body calls for nationwide trade strike on 12 Feb over broken promises

MYSURU, 7 JAN

Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha Finance Secretary HR Naveenkumar on Saturday urged farmers, labourers and all working-class for the success of All India strike on 12 February in protest against the government's alleged anti people, anti-farmers, anti-labour and anti-democratic policies.

Addressing the gathering at the 3rd district level Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha conference held at Buddha Vihar in the city, Naveenkumar described the ruling dispensation at the centre a corporate oriented government, "not in favour of farmers and labourers".

- Naveenkumar slammed the State government delaying the distribution of title deeds, land ownership rights to 20 lakh farmers, cultivating the bagair hukum and other government land

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to double the income of farmers during his regime, but farmers were most affected during his government," he alleged.

He also criticised the State government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for delaying the distribution of title deeds, land ownership rights to 20 lakh farmers, cultivating the bagair hukum and other government land across the State.

"CM Siddaramaiah who claims to be the champion of social justice, also neglected the interest of poor farmers, bagair hukum land cultivators," Naveenkumar charged.

The Prantha Raitha Sangha further gave a call to picketing the residence of CM Siddaramaiah in Mysuru demanding distribution of title deeds for bagair hukum land cultivators in April. *—Salar News*

ADOPTION LETTER FABRICATED

Parents among 5 held for selling 6-day-old baby

SRINIVASAPUR, 7 FEB

Police have arrested five people for allegedly selling a six-day-old baby in Srinivaspur, Kolar district on Saturday. The arrested include the parents of the infant boy.

The police have rescued the baby, and will be handed over to the Child Care Centre of the Child Welfare Department, and arrested the accused within twelve hours of the sale transaction.

The accused parents, Neetha, 30, and Raghavendra, 27, were in a live-in relationship. Neeha gave birth to the boy on 31 January. As Neetha already had two children, a boy from her previous marriage, and girl with Raghavendra, they allegedly decided to sell the newborn.

Another accused, Narayanaswamy, got wind of their plan said he would look for a "purchaser".

He approached a couple, Manjula and Balakrishna in Chintamani, brought them to Srinivaspura and showed them the baby. They allegedly agreed to purchase the baby for Rs 5 lakh, and paid Rs 38,000 for the hospital charges and gave Rs 80,000 in cash to Neetha and Rahgavendra. They said that they would pay the remaining amount in a few days. Manjula and Balakrishna allegedly took the baby to their home in Chintamani on Saturday.

The inspector noted both the seller and the purchaser furnished a letter of adoption.

Around midnight Saturday, police learned of the illegal transaction and apprehended Manjula and Balakrishna, bringing them and the baby to the station. All five confessed and have been remanded to judicial custody, police said.

Neetha, native of a village in Srinivasapur taluk had previously married Santosh and had a son. However, Santosh reportedly left her. Neetha, who works with a private company in Narasapur industrial area in Kolar, befriended Raghavendra, who was also working as driver at the same company. They both began a live-in relationship, and had a daughter four years ago. *—Salar News*

Cardinal Anthony to lead Catholic Bishops' conference

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Cardinal Poola Anthony, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Hyderabad, has been elected as the new President of the CBCI during its 37th general body meeting held here on Saturday at the St John's Medical College here. Cardinal Poola Anthony succeeds Archbishop Andrews Thazhath.

On 19 November 2020, Pope Francis appointed Cardinal Anthony as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Hyderabad. He was proclaimed Cardinal by Pope Francis during the Consistory held on 27 August 2022, and was assigned the title of Ss. Protomartiri a Via Aurelia Antica, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) said in a statement.

"With his election as the President of the CBCI, Cardinal Poola Anthony assumes leadership of the Catholic Church in India at a crucial moment, bringing with him decades of pastoral experience, administrative leadership, and a strong commitment to the Church's mission in the service of the faith, justice, and human dignity," the statement said.

Cardinal Poola assumes leadership of the coordinating body of Catholic bishops in India at a time of social, pastoral, and constitutional challenges facing the Church and the nation *—PTI*

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—ANI

Nitin Nabin kicks off BJP's poll campaign in Kerala

THISSUR, 7 FEB

BJP president Nitin Nabin on Saturday kick-started the party's campaign for the upcoming assembly election in Kerala by drawing a lotus on a wall. Nabin on a two-day visit to Kerala, visited various places in Ernakulam and Thrissur districts, and held meetings with BJP and NDA leaders. He painted a lotus as part of a wall-writing event at Booth 164 in Thrissur town to mark the start of the party's election campaign. "This event marks the official launch of the BJP's election charge in Kerala, signaling a new era of political resolve in the state," the party said in a statement. Later, addressing party supporters, Nabin said BJP karyakartas in Kerala were fully committed to strengthening the party's presence in both panchayats and Parliament.—*PTI*

—ANI

J&K must harness its hydropower, says Amit Shah

JAMMU, 7 FEB

Reviewed development projects in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah highlighting the need to utilise the Union Territory's full potential of hydropower projects Shah said the Centre is firmly committed to the vision of building a developed and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir. During his two-day visit to the region Shah undertook a comprehensive review of key sectors, such as road infrastructure, power, industry, tourism, 4G and optical-fibre connectivity. He also held meeting with state leaders and Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi, with a focus on terrorism. He said a special focus should be laid on achieving 100 per cent saturation of the government's welfare schemes and ensuring they reach beneficiaries.—*PTI*

Rahul came at me after losing cool: Bittu on face-off

CHANDIGARH, 7 FEB

Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu criticised Rahul Gandhi for calling him a "traitor" and alleged Gandhi was coming towards him after losing his temper. Bittu, a Rajya Sabha MP and BJP member, lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP leaders for supporting him. The incident occurred outside Parliament's main entrance on Wednesday, where Gandhi was protesting with suspended Congress MPs. Bittu claimed Gandhi's behaviour was aggressive, saying, "He became so violent, only God knows what he had." He also accused several other Congress leaders of criticising him. —*PTI*

Tamil Nadu to present Interim Budget on 17 Feb

TIRUNELVELI, 7 FEB

The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly will meet on 17 February and Finance Minister Thangam Thenarasu will table the Interim Budget for 2026-27 in the House on the opening day, Speaker M Appavu said on Saturday. The House would convene at 9.30 am on the day at the Legislative Assembly Hall in the State Secretariat complex in Fort St George campus. Appavu said that on 20 February, the Vote-on-Account--Advance Demands for Grants for 2026-27 and Supplementary (Final) Demands for Grants for Additional Expenditure for 2025-26 would be presented in the House by the government. The Assembly meeting will be last ahead of the Assembly polls.—*PTI*

BJP to get 1st mayor in Mumbai after 4 decades

Shiv Sena (UBT) had ruled the Mumbai civic body for 25 yrs

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

The BJP is set to install its first mayor in Mumbai after over four decades, with the party's corporator Ritu Tawde filing her nomination on Saturday for election to the post.

Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, the saffron party's ally in the Mahayuti, has declared Sanjay Ghadi as its candidate for the deputy mayor's post.

Tawde and Ghadi filed their nominations at the municipal secretary's office in the presence of Minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha, BJP's Mumbai unit Chief Ameet Satam, former Shiv Sena MP Rahul Shewale, and other leaders of Mahayuti.

Elections will be held on 11 February.

In the polls to the 227-member Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the BJP emerged as the single largest party with 89 seats, while Shiv Sena won 29 seats. The ruling alliance, with a combined strength of 118 corporators is well placed to secure the mayor's and deputy mayor's post.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), which ruled the civic body for 25 years won 65 seats, while its allies, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) won six and one seat, respectively.

Tawde, a corporator from Ghatkopar East (ward 132), joined BJP in 2012.

Ghadi, a corporator from Ward 5, will serve as deputy mayor for 15 months.

Deputy mayoral candidate Sanjay Shankar Ghad and Mumbai mayoral candidate leader Ritu Tawde at the BMC headquarters in Mumbai —*PTI*

2 Zilla Parishads, 125 Panchayat Samitis go to polls

Polling for 12 Zilla Parishads and 125 Panchayat Samitis in 12 districts of Maharashtra began on Saturday morning, with a voter turnout of 7.80 per cent recorded till 9.30 am.

The Zilla Parishad polls are being seen as a litmus test for the NCP factions, which are contesting in an alliance. Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samities of Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Pune, Satara, Sangli, Solapur, Kolhapur, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Parbhani, Dharashiv, and Latur will be voting. —*PTI*

Doubts over death of Ajit Pawar, Rohit to present case

PUNE, 7 FEB

NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar on Saturday said questions remain over the circumstances of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's death in an air crash and announced he would make a detailed presentation in Mumbai on 10 February.

Speaking after voting in the Zilla Parishad polls in Baramati, the MLA said Ajit Pawar had wanted the rival NCP factions to reunite and efforts towards a merger would continue. The local body polls, postponed after the 28 January, crash, were held on Saturday.

Rohit Pawar said issues surrounding how and why the crash occurred would be raised publicly. He added that Ajit Pawar sincerely wished for party unity and described the Pawar family as still united. He will further explain the intent behind the proposed merger on 12 February.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut said several NCP leaders have also expressed doubts. —*PTI*

US TO MONITOR OIL IMPORTS

Namaste Trump scored over Howdy Modi: Cong on pact

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Congress on Saturday took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the US-India trade pact, saying 'Namaste Trump scored over Howdy Modi'. It said the deal is against India's interests.

The opposition party cited a White House release which said the US will now monitor whether India is importing oil from Russia, and said, "Naam Narender, Kaam Surrender".

Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh said while the US-India joint statement just issued is silent on details, it said India will slash import duties to help American farmers at the cost of Indian farmers.

"…. Namaste Trump has scored over Howdy Modi," the Congress leader said, adding, "Dost dost na raha",

The US has said that India has committed to stop directly or indirectly importing Russian oil, following which the additional 25 per cent tariffs imposed by America on Indian goods will be removed effective 7 February.

Trump's announcement of the deal showed that it was done at India's request, he claimed.

Modi said the agreement will strengthen the 'Make in India' initiative by opening up new opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs, and create jobs for women and youngsters.

- Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said while the US-India joint statement is silent on details, it said India will slash import duties to help American farmers at the cost of Indian farmers.

The interim pact will open a USD 30 trillion market for Indian exporters.

Meanwhile, the BJP said the India-US trade deal will "significantly" benefit the country and slammed the Congress for claiming that the odds are "stacked heavily against India."

BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari claimed that the Congress is clearly uncomfortable seeing India emerge as a global deal-maker under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. —*PTI*

CPI (M), Cong clash over Jamaat-e-Islami in Kerala

KASARAGOD, 7 FEB

The CPI(M) and Congress in Kerala exchanged sharp accusations over Jamaat-e-Islami. The ruling party accused the opposition of colluding with communal forces and giving them a favourable image.

CPM State Secretary MV Govindan claimed the Congress's Pudhu Yuga Yatra aimed to whitewash extremist groups and alleged the Congress was trying to endorse Jamaat-e-Islami. He further accused the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) of aligning ideologically with Jamaat-e-Islami.

Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan countered, stating CPI(M) should not lecture about communalism. He accused the Marxist party of indulging in appeasement, noting leaders like Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan allegedly accepted Jamaat-e-Islami votes. Satheesan claimed the Left had sought minority votes till recent elections and then shifted focus to the majority. He criticised CPI(M) for a "double standard" and said Jamaat-e-Islami had supported CPI(M) for over four decades, with leaders, including Vijayan, elected with its backing.

CPM's MV Govindan —*WIKIPEDIA*

- Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan said CPI(M) should not lecture about communalism. He accused it of indulging in appeasement, noting its leaders allegedly accepted Jamaat-e-Islami votes.

He cited Vijayan's previous public support for Jamaat-e-Islami and claimed CPI(M) shared platforms with the organisation for 42 years. Satheesan argued that those branded secular for decades were now being labelled communal overnight, accusing CPI(M) of "selective amnesia". The exchange followed Satheesan's statement that UDF would accept Jamaat-e-Islami's support, as the group said it does not advocate for a religion-based nation. —*PTI*

Plea over my 1980 voter list entry politically motivated: Sonia Gandhi

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Sonia Gandhi's counsel claimed in a Delhi court that allegations linking her to an electoral roll entry in 1980, before she acquired Indian citizenship in 1983, are politically motivated and filed for extraneous reasons. The reply was submitted before Special Judge Vishal Gogne, who is hearing a revision plea against a magistrate's order of September 2025, which refused to probe the matter.

Advocates Tarannum Cheema, Kanishka Singh, and Akash Singh argued the complaint was "wholly misconceived, frivolous, politically motivated, and an abuse of the process of law". They said citizenship matters are under the Central government's jurisdiction, and electoral disputes are for the Election Commission. The complaint lacked supporting documents, with no mention of the application or its contents, and was based on an unsubstantiated claim.

They further highlighted that presuming Gandhi's application led to her inclusion in the electoral roll is misleading, and over 40 years old allegations are inherently stale, violating constitutional protections under Article 21. The court will consider further proceedings on 21 February. —*PTI*

Debate is bedrock of democracy, says Om Birla

PATNA. 7 FEB

Emphasising that debate and discussion are fundamental to democracy, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla stated on Saturday that the decorum of the House must be preserved at any cost.

Addressing the Bihar Assembly's foundation day, Birla reminded elected representatives that while they hold the privilege to express their views, they must do so with dignity. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav remained conspicuous by their absence from the programme, which was also attended by Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju.

To mark the occasion, he unveiled the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA), a digital initiative to move legislatures toward paperless functioning.Hosted on the NIC cloud, NeVA provides members with handheld access to rules, agendas, notices, bills, questions and answers, committee reports, and other legislative business, officials said.

The project aims to bring all legislatures together. —*PTI*

GANGSTER JOGA PHOLRIWAL BOOKED IN AAP LEADER'S MURDER

CHANDIGARH, 7 FEB

Punjab Police have registered a case against two named individuals, including a foreign-based gangster, and two unknown persons over the daylight murder of **AAP leader Lucky Oberoi** in Jalandhar on Friday.

Police suspect personal enmity as the motive behind the killing.

Gangster Jograj Singh alias Joga Pholriwal, who claimed responsibility for the murder via an unverified social media post, Dalbira, and two unidentified individuals have been booked under relevant sections of the BNS and Arms Act at Division 6 police station, based on a complaint from the victim's family.

The assailant and accomplice remain unidentified, with police deploying teams to trace them. Oberoi was shot outside a gurdwara in Jalandhar's Model Town shortly after paying respects. CCTV footage shows the attacker, wearing a black hoodie, opening fire, and fleeing. —*PTI*

Pappu Yadav sent to judicial custody in forgery case

NEW DELHI/PATNA, 7 FEB

Independent MP Rajesh Ranjan, also known as Pappu Yadav, was remanded to two days of judicial custody by a Patna court on Saturday, following his arrest in connection with a 1995 forgery case.

Yadav was arrested Friday night at his Mandiri home after an MP/MLA court issued a warrant in a forgery case under IPC Section 467.

Advocate Shivnandan Bharti, who appeared in the court for Yadav, claimed that "a false case has been filed against Yadav for obstructing the police's work".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the arrest of Bihar MP Pappu Yadav was a political vendetta meant to silence demands for accountability, saying Yadav had spoken up for justice for a NEET aspirant who died under mysterious circumstances in Patna.The student from Jehanabad was found unconscious in a Patna hostel last month and died on 11 January after days in a coma. Her family alleges sexual assault and a cover-up. —*PTI*

Andhra Pradesh to launch 2 indigenous quantum computers

AMRAVATI, 7 FEB

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday said two indigenous quantum computers will be launched here on 14 April to mark World Quantum Day. Speaking after laying the foundation for Amaravati Quantum Valley at Uddandarayunipalem village in the greenfield capital, Naidu said the computers will operate from a private college. "On 14 April, World Quantum Day, we will launch two indigenous quantum computers in Amaravati as reference facilities," he said, adding that the state is prepared to manufacture 85 per cent of components.

Naidu said quantum computers will be manufactured in Amaravati within two years and supplied across India and globally. Calling the ceremony "historic", he urged students to embrace artificial intelligence, said India should not depend on other countries for technology, and called quantum computing a "once-in-a-generation opportunity".

Referring to Davos, he said artificial intelligence and green energy dominated discussions, added that 2026 belongs to artificial intelligence, and said AQV and the Green Hydrogen Valley will be game-changers.

He said, "Earlier, everybody used to talk about Silicon Valley. Now, everybody will talk about AQV." He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi and announced an AI university in February. —*PTI*

ISSUES APOLOGY

'Patriotic excitement' behind remarks on Sofia: Minister

INDORE, 7 FEB

With a Supreme Court-mandated deadline for his prosecution looming large, Madhya Pradesh Minister Vijay Shah on Saturday apologised again for his objectionable remarks about Colonel Sofia Qureshi.

Shah said that he had uttered the words in a moment of "patriotic excitement" and never intended to insult a woman officer, the armed forces or any section of society.

The Supreme Court had directed the state government to decide within two weeks whether to grant sanction to prosecute Shah for his controversial remarks about Colonel Qureshi.

The Congress has been demanding Shah's resignation or his removal from the cabinet.

The minister came under fire in 2025 after a video of his remarks about Colonel Qureshi during a speech at a public event in Raikunda village in Indore district went viral on social media.

Colonel Qureshi was in the limelight for briefing the media on 'Operation Sindoor', India's military operation against terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan last year.

Shah said he had repeatedly apologised from the depths of his heart for the controversial remark and was once again seeking forgiveness.

Shah said maintaining "decorum and sensitivity of words" was extremely important in public life.

An FIR was also regiostered against the Minister. —*PTI*

VIJAY WEIGHS 2 CONSTITUENCIES FOR ELECTORAL DEBUT

CHENNAI, 7 FEB

Actor-politician Vijay is considering two possible constituencies in Chennai for his maiden electoral contest in the upcoming Assembly election in Tamil Nadu, a source in the TVK said.

Vijay is considering contesting from either Velachery or Virugambakkam in Chennai and is seeking feedback from party functionaries before making a final decision, the source said.

The choice fell on seats starting with the letter 'V' after he was advised to select one of these constituencies in view of winning prospects. However, a final decision will be taken by the party leader.

Velachery, a metro hub near Vijay's residence, stands in contrast to Vikravandi, where

- Vijay is considering contesting from either Velachery or Virugambakkam in Chennai and is seeking feedback from party functionaries before making a final decision.

TVK's inaugural conference established a secular social justice platform rooted in the ideals of Ambedkar, Periyar, and Kamaraj. In contrast, Vijay clearly defined his opposition, labelling the BJP his "ideological enemy" and the DMK his "political enemy."

TVK launched on 2 February 2024, has been allotted the "whistle" symbol by the Election Commission.

Vijay would finalise the list of candidates. —*PTI*

Minor gets lifer for Vadodara school murder

VADODARA, 7 FEB

A special children's court in Gujarat's Vadodara has sentenced a 16-and-a-half-year-old boy to life imprisonment for murdering his junior in school in 2018. The victim, Dev Tadvi, was stabbed repeatedly in the head and chest just two days after enrolling. The court found the accused premeditated the crime, planning it after being reprimanded by a teacher. The trial examined 20 witnesses and 42 pieces of evidence, considering him capable of understanding his actions, and transferred the case to an adult court for sentencing. —*PTI*

—*PTI*

Search on for those missing in Meghalaya blast

SHILLONG, 7 FEB

Search and rescue operations were underway on Saturday at the illegal coal mine in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district, where 27 people died in a blast, police said. The explosion occurred on Thursday at the mine in the Thangsku area of Umsngat village, prompting authorities to begin large-scale search and rescue operations involving multiple agencies, they said. Several people are still missing, and the rescue teams are looking for them, they added. Meanwhile, a suo motu FIR has been registered at the Khliehriat police station under provisions of the BNS, the Mines and Minerals Act and the Explosive Substances Act. So far, two accused, Chyrmang, 36, of Jalaphet Pordung village and Shamehi War, 42, of Sutnga Pohwailong village, have been arrested in connection with the incident. —*PTI*

—*ANI*

SHO's statement recorded in actor Maniyanpilla case

THIRU'PURAM, 7 FEB

The Museum police station's SHO was recorded as part of an enquiry into an accident involving actor Maniyanpilla Raju. Raju's car collided with a motorcycle near Vellayambalam, injuring two youths. Raju, who left the scene, later appeared at the police station and got bail after a blood test. Police are investigating delays in his custody, with the police commissioner ordering an enquiry. Results of the blood test and vehicle inspection are awaited. Raju said he is a cancer patient and had left due to fear. —*PTI*

—*X/DELHIPOLICE*

Delhi police bust cartel, seize drugs worth Rs 50 crore

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Delhi Police arrested seven suspects linked to a large drug trafficking syndicate across five states, seizing over Rs 50 crore worth of psychotropic substances. The operation began following intelligence about a major consignment, leading to the arrest of Anirudh Rai in Delhi with 2kg of powdered Tramadol. Further raids across Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Haryana resulted in additional arrests, including Manoj Rai, Kishan Pal, Krishan Tanwar, and others. The investigation continues to trace further members and suppliers of the illicit network. —*PTI*

App-based cabbies, auto drivers go on strike

M'rashtra govt warns aggregators against unfair practices

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Drivers of app-based taxis and autorickshaws went on a day-long nationwide strike on Saturday after a union called for a protest in connection with various demands like action against illegal bike taxies and grievances over panic button installation.

Maharashtra Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik warned the ride aggregators that if they behave unfairly with drivers, the government will act against the companies. He also said the government is ready to stand by drivers on all genuine issues.

The head of the Maharashtra Kamgar Sabha, Dr Keshav Kshirsagar, said that the strike began across Maharashtra and other parts of the country in the morning. Most autorickshaw and taxi drivers have supported the strike, he said.

Although the union claimed that drivers have kept their vehicles off the roads, taxis and autorickshaws are available on the app-based platforms of major companies like Uber, Ola and Rapido.

The Maharashtra Kamgar Sabha had earlier said that the strike was aimed at opposing the "arbitrary" fare policies of ride aggregators and strict enforcement against "illegal" bike taxies.

Drivers associated with mobile app-based taxi services from various parts of India stage a protest at the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi against proposed transport policies —*PTI*

The union representing gig workers also said that the installation of panic buttons has become a financial burden for operators.

"While there are 140 panic button device providers approved by the Centre, the state government has declared nearly 70 per cent of these companies unauthorised. As a result, cab drivers are being forced to remove installed devices and spend approximately Rs 12,000 to install new devices, causing severe financial hardship," the statement said.

The drivers' body also raised concerns over loss of income due to an increase in the number of autorickshaws under the open permit policy, and also alleged that victims of accidents involving illegal bike taxis are denied insurance benefits.

Talking to reporters in Thane, minister Sarnaik said the stir should not inconvenience citizens. — *PTI*

FAILURE TO INFORM AUTHORITIES

Delhi police arrest sub-contractor in biker death case

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Delhi police has arrested a sub-contractor in connection with the death of a biker who fell into a pit dug by the Delhi Jal Board in Delhi's Janakpuri, officials said on Saturday.

Investigations revealed that sub-contractor Rajesh Prajapati was informed about the accident hours earlier, but failed to take any action.

Police said a family passing through the area had seen the victim, Kamal, 25, had fallen into the pit. They immediately alerted a security guard deployed at the site and a person living in a tent nearby.

The guard, employed by Prajapati, informed a junior staffer immediately. The junior staffer then called Prajapati at around 12.22 am and asked him to come to the spot. Prajapati arrived at the site and saw a motorcycle and the man inside the pit but he didn't inform anyone.

Kamal Dhyani, a resident of Kailashpuri and an employee of a private bank, was returning home when he fell into the nearly 15-feet-deep pit.

The arrested sub-contractor Rajesh Prajapati —*X/DELHIPOLICE*

Meanwhile, Delhi Urban Development Minister Ashish Sood said on Saturday that the government has suspended officials suspected of negligence. Sood said a committee was constituted on Friday. He added that FIRs have been registered against the DJB and the contractor.

The Delhi government has directed Jal Board engineers to inspect all construction sites and ensure safety. — *PTI*

Coast Guard busts oil smuggling racket

NEW DELHI/PANAJI, 7 FEB

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Saturday busted an international oil smuggling racket by apprehending vessels linked to it, about 100 nautical miles west of the coast of Mumbai, as part of a mid-sea operation.

The said vessels had devised a method to smuggle large volumes of cheap oil and oil-based cargo from the "conflict-ridden countries and profit by mid-sea transfer to motor tankers in international waters," the ICG) said in statement.

"Three vessels were intercepted by ICG ships, about 100 nautical miles west of Mumbai, on 5 February, and through corroboration of electronic data onboard the suspect vessels and verification of documents, the ICG's boarding team established the modus operandi of the criminals," the Coast Guard said.

The vessels were found to frequently change identity to evade law enforcement actions by coastal states. The vessel owners are based in other countries, according to initial investigations, the maritime force said.

Sharing the sequence of events, the ICG said its "tech-inclusive systems" detected a motor tanker conducting "suspicious activity" in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zones.

The vessels will be handed over to Indian Customs and other agencies for necessary legal action, according to ICG release. — *PTI*

One of the ships intercepted by the Coast Guard —*X/INDIACOASTGUARD*

Churachandpur limps back to normalcy after 2-day protests

CHURACHANDPUR/IMPHAL, 7 FEB

Normalcy began returning to parts of Manipur's Churachandpur district on Saturday after two days of protests, police said.

The violent protests began on Thursday after three BJP legislators from the Kuki-Zo and Hmar communities joined Meitei MLAs to form a government in the strife-hit state.

MLA Nemcha Kipgen joined the Y Khemchand Singh-led government as deputy chief minister, while LM Khaute and N Sanate supported her.

The demonstrations were confined to Tuibong and Kangvai areas in Churachandpur town, police said.

While most areas of Churachandpur town witnessed resumption of business, several shops in the Tuibong area remained closed, they said.

Two tribal bodies imposed a "total shutdown" in Kuki-dominated Churachandpur, while rallies were held in Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal districts, alleging that the legislators had betrayed their community.

The Kuki-Zo groups have been demanding a separate administrative unit for them, as the violence that broke out in May 2023 deeply divided the state on ethnic lines, with members of the two communities not venturing into each other's areas.

Meanwhile, the Zomi Council, the apex body of the Zomi tribe, has summoned the three legislators who joined the government to appear before its office within three days and submit an explanation. The council warned that failure to respond to its "call for dialogue" would compel it to ban the legislators' from the Zomi Council premises. — *PTI*

Members of the Kuki Students Organisation of Delhi & NCR stage a protest at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar against the Manipur government demanding justice and rehabilitation for the victims of the ethnic violence —*PTI*

Laws must promote harmony, not discord: Kerala HC

KOCHI, 7 FEB

The Kerala High Court has ruled that laws should promote social harmony rather than create discord among religions, castes or communities. The observation came while dismissing a plea challenging the entry of two Christian priests into the Adoor Sree Parthasarathy Temple in Pathanamthitta district in 2023.

The priests, including Dr Zacharias Mar Aprem, were invited to attend a function linked to Sreekrishna Jayanthi celebrations and were permitted entry as guests by the temple tantri. The court held that such a ceremonial entry was not a matter of right and did not violate the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act, 1965.

A bench of Justices Vijayaraghavan and KV Jayakumar said the Act does not prohibit the entry of non-Hindus and that in case of inconsistency the parent Act prevails over Rules. — *PTI*

Ghaziabad girls were depressed after dad seized their phones

GHAZIABAD, 7 FEB

Investigation into the suicide of the three minor sisters in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad revealed that they were depressed as their father had sseized their phones after finding that they were obsessed with Korean culture, police said. Due to this, the girls could not play online games and talk to their Korean friends, the police said, adding that their father later sold the phones.

On the night of the incident, they took their mother's phone, but could not access the Korean app on that device. The forensic team could not find any access of the Korean app. The fingerprints, including the handwritten suicide note and the messages, have been sent to the forensic science laboratory, DCP (Trans Hindon) Nimish Patil said on Saturday.

In 2015, the father Chetan Kumar's live-in partner died under suspicious circumstances after falling from the roof of a flat in Rajendra Nagar Colony. Later, the police dismissed the case, treating the death as a suicide, Patil said.

Interrogation has confirmed that Kumar has three wives, Sujata (Nishika's mother), Heena (Prachi and Pakhi's mother) and Tina. All three wives are biological sisters.

The sisters were more attached to their father than their mothers. That is why they addressed only him in the suicide note. — *PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Explosives found in lorry in Kerala

MALAPPURAM, 7 FEB

Over 10,500 gelatin sticks and detonators were seized from an onion-laden lorry at Chemmad in Malappuram district on Saturday, police said. A woman who owns the lorry has been taken into custody for questioning.

According to police, around 245 boxes containing gelatin sticks, detonators and wires were recovered from a lorry parked at a brick manufacturing unit. The vehicle had arrived at the unit late on Friday night. Acting on a tip-off, police rushed to the spot, following which the people unloading the consignment fled.

On Saturday morning, officers unloaded the lorry and discovered the explosive materials concealed among bags of onions. Police said the quantification process has been completed and a case will be registered soon.

Investigators said the woman taken into custody also runs a quarry, raising suspicion that the explosives were intended for illegal mining.

The explosives were allegedly brought from outside Kerala, and efforts are under way to trace their source and the network involved. — *PTI*

Apex court to hear plea on Himachal lawmakers' case

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a plea filed by the Himachal Pradesh government challenging a high court order that blocked the withdrawal of 45 criminal cases against sitting and former MPs and MLAs. A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant issued notice on the state's challenge to the 26 April, 2024, Himachal Pradesh High Court ruling, which allowed withdrawal of only 15 out of 65 cases recommended by the home department.

Five cases, including one involving Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, were disposed of during the proceedings.

The cases relate to rallies and protests held during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The HC had refused to withdraw cases involving offences under the IPC, the Disaster Management Act and the National Highways Act, citing a 2020 SC judgment that mandates court approval for withdrawing cases against lawmakers. — *PTI*

- The HC had refused to scrap cases under the IPC and the Disaster Management Act, citing a 2020 SC order that mandates court consent for withdrawing cases against lawmakers

BOON FOR CHRONIC PATIENTS

Doc-led AI brings hospital care home

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

In a first-of-its-kind approach to patient care, a doctor-led AI healthcare ecosystem is providing real-time medical supervision for people with chronic conditions. By extending care beyond hospital walls, officials say the system prevents conditions from escalating into serious illnesses.

At its core is iLive Connect, a wireless biosensor patch and wristband that continuously monitors vital signs, including ECG, heart and respiratory rates, oxygen levels, temperature, blood pressure trends, activity, and heart rate variability.

The data is transmitted wirelessly to a secure cloud-based platform and relayed to a dedicated medical command centre, said Dr Rahul Chandola, cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon and founder of iLive Connect, which is staffed around the clock by specialised doctors who monitor patients in real time.

Unlike conventional monitors that react after symptoms appear, iLive Connect uses AI-driven predictive analytics to detect subtle physiological changes well before clinical symptoms develop.

This early identification allows doctors to intervene at a preventive stage, significantly reducing complications, avoiding medical emergencies, and decreasing the need for repeat hospitalisation, Chandola said.

According to Chandola, the system addresses a major healthcare gap: the lack of continuous supervision after hospital discharge.

Dr Viveka Kumar, iLive Connect co-founder and senior interventional cardiologist, said it is especially beneficial for seniors living alone, chronic patients, and those recently discharged, a particularly vulnerable period.

The platform enables access to specialist supervision irrespective of geography, allowing patients in remote regions of the country to receive advanced medical monitoring without frequent hospital visits, the statement said. — *PTI*

GOVT WORK IS GOD'S WORK

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah poses for a group photo during a programme to felicitate NCC cadets from the Karnataka and Goa Directorate who participated in the 2026 Republic Day Parade, in Bengaluru, on Saturday —PTI

Smart Cities Mission has transformed just 31 cities

Among 100 selected cities across the country, only 31 have been converted to 'smart' cities under a five-year project beginning in 2016, which has been extended thrice, according to an RTI reply by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

In response to the query filed under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, the ministry informed that 43 cities are near completion, and it will take some time to convert the remaining 26 cities.

The Smart Cities Mission project aims to improve the quality of life in 100 cities by providing efficient services, robust infrastructure, and sustainable solutions. The project was to be completed in four phases.

The ministry, in the reply, said that under the first phase of the 'Smart City Mission', 20 cities were selected in January 2016. In the second phase, 40 cities were selected from May to September, 2016, 30 cities were selected in June 2017 under the third phase, and 10 cities were selected by January 2018 in the fourth phase.

However, the ministry decided to extend the deadline to June 2023. It was then extended again to 30 June, 2024, and then to 31 March, 2025.

In its reply, the ministry said that till December 2025, 31 cities have been transformed into smart cities at a cost of Rs 59,385 crore in about 10 years.

It clarified that the 'Smart City Mission' was not aimed at developing an entire city, but rather at area-based development. The plan included redevelopment and green spaces, without demolishing old structures, and developing a model that could be adopted by other cities.

Smart Cities Mission project aims to improve the quality of life in 100 cities by providing efficient services —PIXABAY

In response to a query, the ministry said that till 24 June, 2025, 8,067 projects (94 per cent of the total projects) have been completed in these 100 cities under the Mission at a cost of Rs 1.64 lakh crore.

According to the RTI reply, the 31 cities declared 'Smart Cities' include Agartala (77 projects), Agra (62), Atal Nagar (52), Bareilly (88), Bhopal (82), Chandigarh (97), Coimbatore (72), Dahod (36), Erode (55), Indore (231), Jabalpur (130), Jhansi (78), Kohima (40), Madurai (16), Moradabad (41), Patna (34), Pune (55), Rajkot (71), Ranchi (26), Salem (114), Shivamogga (112), Solapur (49), Surat (87), Tuticorin (75), Tiruchirappalli (83), Tirunelveli (81), Tiruppur (28), Tumakuru (217), Udaipur (143), Vadodara (52) and Varanasi (117).

According to the information shared by the ministry, among these 31 smart cities, the cities on which the maximum amount has been spent include Indore, Tripura, Surat, Varanasi, Bhopal and Rajkot.

As many as 231 projects have been completed in Indore at a cost of Rs 3,751 crore, 28 in Tripura at Rs 2,833 crore, 87 in Surat at Rs 2,694 crore, 117 in Varanasi at Rs 3,342 crore, 114 in Salem at Rs 1,861 crore and 112 projects in Shivamogga a cost of Rs 1,381 crore, the reply said.

Vivek Kumar, Joint Director in the Smart City Division, refused to comment on the matter, saying he was not authorised to provide information.

The ministry said the 43 cities where work is nearly complete include Visakhapatnam (2), Guwahati (1), Bhagalpur (1), Panaji (4), Ahmedabad (2), Gandhinagar (2), Shimla (3), Jammu (4), Bengaluru (1), Davangere (1), Hubballi-Dharwad (2), Kochi (2) and Thiruvananthapuram (3), among others.

Joint Secretary Rupa Mishra, who holds additional charge of the 'Smart City Mission', refused to share any information citing a busy schedule.

The 26 cities where the projects will take some more time to complete include Port Blair (9), Kakinada (12), Tirupati (12), Itanagar (7), Pasighat (5), Biharsharif (5), and Srinagar (5), among others. —PTI

SALAR ساڈھ

She filmed Iran's violence, and now lives in fear

As tear gas canisters landed among protesters filling the wide boulevard, the 37-year-old beautician and her friends ran for cover. They sheltered among trees, concealed in darkness pierced only by the glow of streetlights and small fires in the western Iranian city of Karaj.

Then gunfire rang out, audible in the video she was taking on her phone.

"Don't be afraid," she screamed. The crowd joined at the top of their lungs: "Don't be afraid. We are all together." "Are they using live bullets?" she cried out. "Shameless! Shameless!" Others joined in the chant, along with cries of "Death to the dictator!"

It was a moment of collective boldness on 8 January, the night thousands of Iranians took to the streets against the cleric-led theocracy that has ruled for nearly 50 years. But after the bloodshed of that night, the beautician, like countless others, has retreated into terrified isolation. She moved in with her mother, afraid to be alone, and has huddled there, anxious and unable to sleep.

A blanket of fear has settled over Iran, she said, and a sense of grief and quiet rage has taken over. "When you look at people, it feels like you are seeing walking corpses, people with no hope left to continue living," she said in a text message.

Her videos and messages provide a raw account of the exuberance that protesters felt taking to the streets — and the shock that has paralysed many after the bloodiest crackdown ever inflicted by the Islamic Republic.

She saw little hope in Iran-US nuclear talks. She feared Iran's leaders would outlast Trump's pressure and "become entrenched and all those people who died will have died in vain," she wrote.

Monitoring groups say at least 6,854 were killed but they say the full number could be triple that.

The Associated Press received more than a dozen videos and text messages the beautician sent to a relative in Los Angeles during sporadic openings in the internet shutdown.

The economy struggled in Iran, crippled by decades of corruption and international sanctions. With few jobs, she chose to work as a nail technician. She gave up on having a family, the relative said. Everything was too expensive, and it was too repressive to bring up kids.

She had little faith in Iranian politicians claiming to be moderates and reformers, but she joined protests. She participated in the 2022 protests ignited by the death of Mahsa Amini, who died after being arrested for not wearing her headscarf. But she was disillusioned by the violence that followed. Over 500 were killed.

Her desire changed "from saving her country to saving herself," the relative said. Her family looked for opportunities for her to leave Iran, but they never materialised.

When protests triggered by the plunging value of Iran's currency began in late December, she didn't take part. But when she found she could hardly even afford cooking oil, it was the last straw. She told her relative that she made the equivalent of only USD 40 in December, down from a paltry USD 300-USD 400 average for the past year.

She made plans with her friends to join the protests.

On 8 January night, Iranians poured into the streets of at least 192 cities. Possibly the biggest anti-government rallies since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Her videos show protesters filling a main boulevard in Karaj. Their confidence bolstered by their numbers. Women, men and children chant, "Death to Khamenei."

Some chanted in support of the exiled crown prince Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's last shah, who had called for the public to turn out. It is not clear from her videos how the violence began.

One video shows protesters outside a police station, cheering, while a fire burned inside. From inside the station, police fired tear gas, live ammunition quickly followed. The beautician saw nearly 20 people shot. A friend's father was killed, and authorities later made his daughter pay USD 4,500 to release his body.

In one video, a group huddled over a wounded protester, her leg covered in blood. They frantically looked for a way to stop the bleeding. The government has put the death toll from the wave of nationwide protests at more than 3,000, and Khamenei has denounced them as "a coup." —PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

After the war, who shapes Gaza? Competing plans explained

Following a visit to Gaza in January, the UN Undersecretary General, Jorge Moreira da Silva, called the level of destruction there "overwhelming". He estimated that, on average, every person in the densely populated territory is now "surrounded by 30 tonnes of rubble".

This staggering level of destruction raises urgent questions about how, and by whom, Gaza should be rebuilt. Since 2023, a variety of reconstruction plans and other initiatives have tried to imagine what Gaza could look like when the conflict ends for good. But which of these visions will shape Gaza's future?

ISRAEL'S PLAN

The Israeli government's Gaza 2035 plan, which was unveiled in 2024, lays out a three-stage programme to integrate the Gaza Strip into a free-trade zone with Egypt's El-Arish Port and the Israeli city of Sderot.

AI renderings show futuristic skyscrapers, solar farms and water desalination plants in the Sinai peninsula. The plan also shows offshore oil rigs and a new high-speed rail corridor along Salah al-Din Road, Gaza's main highway that connects Gaza City and Rafah.

THE US' 'RIVIERA'

The US government has proposed a similar futuristic vision for Gaza. Its August 2025 Gaza Reconstitution, Economic Acceleration and Transformation Trust plan shows a phased series of modern, AI-powered smart cities developed over 10 years. The plan, which would place Gaza under a US-run trusteeship, suggested that poor urban design lies at the heart of "Gaza's ongoing insurgency".

The latest iteration of this vision was unveiled by Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos.

He presented slides showing Gaza reconstructed as a "Riviera" of the Middle East, with luxury beachfront resorts, gleaming tower blocks, residential zones and modern transport hubs. Kushner suggested it was "doable" to complete the construction of a "new" Rafah city in "two to three years".

It has been reported that the US and Israeli visions are heavily influenced by US-based economics professor Joseph Pelzman's plan. This plan, Pelzman said on a podcast in 2024, would involve destroying Gaza and restarting from scratch.

PHOENIX PLAN

In contrast to the US and Israeli visions, the February 2025 Gaza "Phoenix" plan includes input from the people of Gaza. It has a much stronger focus on maintaining and reconstructing the existing buildings, culture and social fabric of the enclave.

The plan was developed by a consortium of international experts together with professionals and academics from Gaza, the West Bank and the Palestinian diaspora, and suggests a reconstruction and development phase of at least five years.

ARAB WORLD'S TAKE

Other plans from the Arab world take a more technocratic view of reconstruction, but still have a short timescale for reconstruction. These include a five-year plan by the United Arab Emirates-based Al Habtoor Group, which promises to grant 70 per cent of ownership in the holding company that will manage Gaza's reconstruction to the Palestinians.

FEASIBILITY OF REBUILDING GAZA

So, how feasible and inclusive are these different visions? Rebuilding cities after war takes time and money, and requires local resources.

In Gaza, rebuilding will be complicated by the fact that there are now 61 million tonnes of rubble there, as well as other hazardous debris such as unexploded munitions and human remains. This will need to be removed before any reconstruction can commence. The UN estimates that clearing the rubble alone could take 20 years.

For comparison, the Polish capital of Warsaw experienced similar destruction in World War II and it took four decades to rebuild the city's historic centre.

The US and Israeli visions also fail to include Palestinians in the planning of Gaza's future, overlooking any need to consult with Gazan residents. This has led critics to argue that the plans amount to "urbicide", the obliteration of existing cultures through war and reconstruction.

Reports that suggest Gazan residents will be offered cash payments of US$5,000 (£3,650) to leave Gaza "voluntarily" under the US plan, as well as subsidies covering four years of rent outside Gaza, will not have alleviated these concerns.

At the same time, the US plan does not propose a conventional land compensation programme for Gazan residents. These people will instead be offered digital tokens in exchange for the rights to redevelop their land.

The tokens could eventually be redeemed for an apartment in one of Gaza's new cities. But the plan also envisages the sale of tokens to investors being used to fund reconstruction.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations, the largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organisation in the US, says the "mass theft" of Palestinian land through the token scheme would amount to a war crime.

Without a fully democratic consensus on how to rebuild Gaza, it is difficult to see how the voices of the Gazan people can be heard.

Whichever vision wins, history shows that post-war reconstruction succeeds when it involves those whose lives have been destroyed.

This is evidenced somewhat ironically by the US Marshall Plan, which funded the reconstruction of many European economies and cities after the second world war, and involved close engagement with locals to achieve success. —*The Conversation*

Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump and his son-in-law and White House advisor Jared Kushner and UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, they all have big plans to revamp Gaza but critics say that none have considered consulting the residents. The UN estimates that it could take nearly 20 years to just clear the rubble in Gaza — PTI

PTI

US approves dicamba weed killer for GM crops

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

The US EPA has reapproved dicamba for use on genetically modified soybeans and cotton, raising concerns over its drift and potential crop damage. The agency describes dicamba as essential for farmers fighting fast-growing weeds and has imposed strict protections, including limits on application rates, hot days, and buffer zones, stating it can be used safely if guidelines are followed. Critics, including environmental groups, argue the move will increase environmental harm and crop damage, citing past court blocks in 2020 and 2024. Kelly Ryerson of Make American Healthy Again expressed disappointment, saying, "New restrictions are not enough; they will perpetuate the chemical treadmill."—*PTI*

Board of Peace meeting on 19 Feb in DC: Report

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

The White House is planning a leaders meeting of the Gaza "Board of Peace" on 19 February in Washington, Axios reported. The 27-member board, chaired by US President Donald Trump, was authorised by the UN Security Council to oversee the Gaza ceasefire and guide governance and reconstruction. Trump launched the initiative on 22 January at the World Economic Forum in Davos. While framed as a peacekeeping body, it has faced resistance from Western allies, some of whom see it as an attempt to create an alternative UN Security Council. The meeting aims to advance the ceasefire's second phase and raise reconstruction funds. —*AGENCIES*

Colorado man gets 40 yrs for abusing nearly 200 corpses

COLORADO, 7 FEB

Jon Hallford, owner of Return to Nature Funeral Home in Colorado, has been sentenced to 40 years in prison for storing 189 decomposing bodies over four years and giving families fake ashes. During his sentencing, family members described recurring nightmares, calling him a "monster" and "vile," urging the judge for the maximum 50-year term. Hallford, who apologised, said he would regret his actions forever. His former wife, Carie Hallford, faces 25–35 years and will be sentenced on 24 April. The Hallfords spent lavishly during their crimes, purchasing luxury cars, jewellery, and cryptocurrency. The ultimately pleaded guilty to nearly 200 counts of corpse abuse and federal fraud over USD 900,000 in pandemic aid. —*PTI*

Yemen's ruling council names new cabinet

CAIRO, 7 FEB

Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council head Rashad al-Alimi has named a new 35-member cabinet weeks after deadly clashes in the south exposed rifts within the Saudi-led coalition. The cabinet, announced in a decree carried by state media, is led by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shae'a al-Zandani and includes only two women. Maj Gen Taher al-Aqili was appointed Defence Minister and Maj Gen Ibrahim Haidan Interior Minister, tasked with overseeing efforts to dismantle separatist militias. The move follows recent fighting involving the Southern Transitional Council, whose push for southern independence has strained ties between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, both key backers of Yemen's official internationally recognised government. —*PTI*

India, Afghan reject links to Pak blast

Pak's Islamic State claims responsibility for Shia mosque blast that killed 36; Three held

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

India and Afghanistan rejected Pakistan's claims that the suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in Islamabad were linked to New Delhi and Kabul.

At least 36 people were killed and 164 others injured when a suicide bomber blew himself up at Khadijah al-Kubra mosque-cum-imambargah in the Tarlai area of Islamabad, in one of the worst terror attacks targeting the community in recent years

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) condemned the bombing and loss of life. But it rejected being tied to the blast, saying in a statement: "It is unfortunate that, instead of seriously addressing the problems plaguing its social fabric, Pakistan should choose to delude itself by blaming others for its home-grown ills. India rejects any and every such allegation, which is as baseless as it is pointless."

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had said that Islamabad had shared evidence with its neighbours terrorism in Pakistan was sponsored by India.

Similarly, Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said the attacker had travelled to Afghanistan, alleging cross-border militant connections. Investigators said that the attacker was in Afghanistan for approximately five months where he allegedly received formal training in weapons handling and suicide attacks.

However, Taliban Defence Ministry spokesman Enayatullah Khwarazmi said Pakistani officials have repeatedly blamed Afghanistan for security incidents without presenting credible proof. Khwarazmi questioned how Pakistani authorities were able to quickly point to alleged external links after such attacks while failing to prevent them.

Notably, the Islamabad mosque bombing comes after a spree of violence linked to the Balochistan fighters. Pakistan's army said at least 216 terrorists, 36 civilians and 22 security personnel were killed in a series of clashes last week.

Last year, Pakistan and Afghanistan had a series of deadly clashes and cross border strikes as Islamabad accused Kabul of supporting cross border terrorism. India also launched Operation Sindoor in response to the Pahalgam terror attack last year, triggering firing along the Kashmir border.

Meanwhile, two brothers of the alleged suicide bomber and a woman were arrested and interrogation is currently underway, a police officer said.

Officials said an identity card recovered helped establish the attacker's identity as Yasir, with a permanent address in Peshwar. —*PTI*

Thousands of mourners attend funeral prayer for the victims of Friday suicide bombing inside a Shiite mosque, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Saturday—*PTI*

The Trump administration has been targetting Harvard and other universities over their 'woke' curriculum and pro-Palestinian protests, which the government alleges is anti-semitic —*INSTA/@HARVARDGS4P*

Pentagon cuts ties with 'woke' Harvard varsity

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

The Pentagon is ending all military training, fellowships and certificate programs with Harvard University, said Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, the latest escalation of the Trump administration against the school.

Hegesth made the announcement on X, calling the Ivy League school "woke" and termed it as "one of the red-hot centres of Hate America activism".

"For too long, this department has sent our best and brightest officers to Harvard, hoping the university would better understand and appreciate our warrior class," Hegseth stated. "Instead, too many of our officers came back looking too much like Harvard — heads full of globalist and radical ideologies that do not improve our fighting ranks."

The changes take effect from the 2026-2027 academic year. Personnel currently attending classes at Harvard will be able to finish those courses.

Similar programs at other Ivy League universities will be evaluated in coming weeks, Hegseth said

The move follows months of threats, demands and lawsuits between the Trump administration and Harvard. US President Donald Trump has targeted federal funding at numerous universities in a broad push to force educational institutions to align themselves with the administration's worldviews and provide student data to the government.

While some universities have fought back against the Trump administration's threats and interreference, others have sought to make a deal in order to keep federal funding. —*Agencies*

Countries trading with Iran face 25% tariffs

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Friday to impose tariffs on countries that trade with Iran. No rate is specified, but the order caps it at 25 per cent. It comes as the US has ramped up its military presence around Iran.

On Friday, negotiations on Iran's nuclear enrichment to deescalate between Iranian and American officials went well , Tehran said. On Air Force One, Trump said Iran "badly" wanted a deal, with talks likely next week.

Separately, the US State Department said Friday it sanctioned 15 entities for trading Iranian-origin oil and petrochemicals. —*Agencies*

US sets June deadline for Ukraine & Russia

KYIV, 7 FEB

The US has given Ukraine and Russia a June deadline to reach a deal to end the nearly four-year war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, as Russian strikes on energy infrastructure forced nuclear power plants to cut output on Saturday.

If the June deadline is not met, the Trump administration will likely put pressure on both sides to meet it, he added.

"They say that they want to do everything by June. And they will do everything to end the war. And they want a clear schedule of all events," Zelenskyy said.

He said the US proposed holding the next round of trilateral talks next week in their country for the first time, likely in Miami.

Zelenskyy said Russia presented the US with a USD 12 trillion economic proposal — which he dubbed the "Dmitriev package" after Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev. Bilateral economic deals with the US form part of the broader negotiating process. However, the Abu Dabhi talks yielded no common ground on managing the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant. Zelenskyy also expressed scepticism about the US proposal to turn the Donbas region, coveted by Russia, into a free economic zone as a compromise.

Meanwhile, Russian strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure with at least 400 drones and about 40 missiles launched overnight on Saturday.

As a result, power deficit in the country increased significantly in Ukraine, said Ukrenergo, the state energy transmission operator.

Nuclear plants reduced their outputs in the second mass attack on energy infrastructure this year. Eight facilities across eight different regions have already come under attack. —*PTI*

Russian strikes hit Ukrainian energy infrastructure, with at least 400 drones and about 40 missiles launched on Saturday—*UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE*

24 killed in drone attack by Sudan's RSF: Docs' group

CAIRO, 7 FEB

A drone attack by the paramilitary the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) hit a vehicle carrying displaced families in central Sudan on Saturday, killing at least 24 people, including eight children, a doctors' group said.

The attack occurred close to the city of Rahad in North Kordofan province, said the Sudan Doctors Network, which tracks the country's ongoing war.

The vehicle transported displaced people who fled fighting in the Dubeiker area of North Kordofan. Among the dead children were two infants, the group said.

They urged the international community and rights organisations to "take immediate action to protect civilians and hold the RSF leadership directly accountable for these violations."

There was no immediate comment from the RSF, which has been at war against the Sudanese military for control of the country for about three years. The devastating war has killed more than 40,000 people, according to UN figures, but aid groups say that is an undercount and the true number could be many times higher. It created the world's largest humanitarian crisis with over 14 million people forced to flee their homes, and thousands others on the brink of famine. —*PTI*

Lawmakers can view unredacted versions of Epstein files

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

The Department of Justice (DOJ) will allow members of Congress to view unredacted versions of files on convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, according to a letter that was sent to lawmakers.

A letter from Monday says lawmakers will be able to review unredacted versions of more than three million DOJ files released under a law passed by Congress last year. Only lawmakers—not staff—may access the files on DOJ computers with 24 hours' notice, and they may take notes but not make electronic copies.

The unredacted files likely include thousands of photos and videos of high-profile political, business, and international figures. However, they will also include the names and identities of victims, and may also include images of sexual abuse.

Epstein killed himself in 2019 while facing charges of sexually abusing and trafficking underage girls. He was accused of paying girls for massages and then molesting them.

CLINTONS DEMAND PUBLIC HEARING

Former US president Bill Clinton and his wife, Hillary Clinton, are challenging the House Oversight Committee's demand for closed-door depositions. The summons follows months of pressure and a contempt recommendation. While the Clintons have agreed to appear—reversing claims the subpoenas were invalid—they are seeking a public hearing to prevent what they say could lead to Republicans politicising the probe. —*PTI*

The unredacted version of the files likely include photos and videos of high-profile political, business, and international figures — —*SCREENGRAB*

POST NOW DELETED

Don won't apologise for racist Obama post

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

US President Donald Trump refused to apologise for a racist post which depicted former president Barack Obama and his wife Michelle Obama by depicting them as primates. However, the post was deleted on Friday, following both Republican and Democrat backlash.

The video was deleted hours after White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt dismissed the backlash as "fake outrage." But Trump later said that he won't apologise for the post. "I didn't make a mistake".

The post on Truth Social pushed false claims of a stolen 2020 election. The 62-second clip ends by depicting the Obamas as primates—a meme parodying Trump as "King of the Jungle" and Democrats as animals. Leavitt called it a 'Lion King' parody. Trump has a record of intensely personal criticism of the Obamas and of using incendiary, sometimes racist, rhetoric.

The post on Truth Social pushed false claims of a stolen 2020 election. The 62-second clip ends by depicting the Obamas as primates —SCREENGRAB

- Trump has also pushed false claims that Obama was born in Kenya and was ineligible for office. Barack was born in Hawaii, a US island state.

In his 2024 campaign, Trump said immigrants were "poisoning the blood," echoing Nazi dehumanisation.

As President Trump has called majority Black nations "shithole countries".

Trump has also pushed false claims that Obama was born in Kenya and was ineligible for office.

Barack was born in Hawaii, a US island state. —*PTI*

Japan's Takaichi set to gain power in Sunday's election

TOKYO, 7 FEB

Japan's Prime Minster Sanae Takaichi, known for her charismatic and straightforward style, is set to expand her influence in Sunday's lower house elections. Takaichi, a supporter favourite, combines toughness with playfulness, earning her popularity among younger voters.

Polls suggest her Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is likely to make significant gains, paving the way for her to lead Japan further to the right, following her mentor Shinzo Abe's hawkish policies.

Born in Nara and raised by conservative parents, Takaichi worked her way up from the middle class, including a brief internship in Denver and careers as a TV personality and critic. Known for her honest talk, she supports Japan's male-only imperial succession and opposes same-sex marriage, despite being the nation's first woman Prime Minister.

As a protege of Abe, she advocates increased military spending and patriotic education. Takaichi, a workaholic who prefers studying at home, has a strict but lighthearted personality, inheriting her mother's discipline. The election results will determine her future role in the country's political direction. —*PTI*

—ANI

Bonfiglioli names Ravindra Pisharody as chairperson

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Bonfiglioli Transmissions, which is set to file its initial public offering (IPO) with markets regulator Sebi later this month, has appointed Ravindra Pisharody as chairperson and independent director. The company has also named Sundaresan Ananthanarayanan and Rossella Schiavini as independent directors, effective February 2026. The appointments come as Bonfiglioli Transmissions, the Indian subsidiary of Italy-based Bonfiglioli Group, prepares to file its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company provides mechanical and electro-mechanical power transmission and industrial drive solutions and has a global presence across more than 80 countries. Pisharody, brings 36 years of leadership experience across major companies. —*PTI*

Arrival of Indian tourists falls by 30% in Azerbaijan

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Azerbaijan saw a 30 per cent year-on-year decline in tourist arrivals from India in 2025, with about 1,70,000 Indians visiting the country compared to 2,40,000 in 2024, mainly due to global geopolitical disruptions affecting air connectivity. Azerbaijan Tourism Board CEO Florian Sengstschmid said airspace closures and flight diversions hit travel demand, while the MICE segment from India declined despite growth in free independent and solo travellers. India remains among Azerbaijan's top five source markets, with Indian tourists spending around USD 180 million. Sengstschmid said arrivals from India are expected to rise by 10–15 per cent in 2026, supported by renewed MICE and wedding bookings and the launch of four weekly Ahmedabad–Baku flights from June. —*PTI*

Nokia opens Rs 270 cr research facility in Chennai

CHENNAI, 7 FEB

Nokia has opened its world's largest research and development facility for fixed networks at SIPCOT Siruseri in Chennai, strengthening Tamil Nadu's leadership in the telecom sector, Industries Minister TRB Rajaa said on Saturday. The expansion follows a memorandum of understanding signed during Chief Minister MK Stalin's visit to the United States in August 2024. The new centre will create more than 200 high-end jobs and act as a global test bed for innovations in 10G to 100G optical networks, fixed wireless access and advanced broadband technologies. Nokia increased its first-phase investment to Rs 270 crore, and will invest another Rs 300 crore. —*PTI*

Court seeks report on plea against project promoters

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

A court has sought an action-taken report from police on a plea seeking registration of an FIR against the promoters of Gurugram-based "32nd Milestone" commercial project over alleged cheating and financial irregularities. Judicial Magistrate Devanshi Janmeja issued notice on 5 February and listed the matter for hearing on 13 March. The plea, filed by senior citizen investor Arvind Gupta, accuses the promoters and related entities of cheating, forgery, criminal conspiracy and fund diversion. Gupta alleges that assured lease rentals stopped in August 2025, and statutory dues, including TDS and GST, were not deposited. The complaint claims false compliance documents, diversion of funds and failure to hand over possession, raising fears of multiple sales of the same units. —*PTI*

No duty concessions on agri, dairy goods

US-India trade pact to safeguard Indian farmers' interests, sustain rural livelihood

—AI

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Under the interim trade agreement with the US, India has fully protected sensitive agricultural and dairy products as no duty concessions will be granted to America on these goods.

India and the US on Saturday announced that they have reached a framework for an interim trade agreement. Under this, the US will reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the earlier 50 per cent.

"The agreement will safeguard farmers' interests and sustaining rural livelihoods by completely protecting sensitive agricultural and dairy products, including maize, wheat, rice, soya, poultry, milk, cheese, ethanol (fuel), tobacco, certain vegetables and meat," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

> These goods are sensitive as they involve the livelihood of small and marginal farmers of the country.The interests of farmers remain paramount in trade negotiations, Piyush Goel said.

These goods are sensitive as they involve the livelihood of small and marginal farmers of the country.

The interests of farmers remain paramount in all trade negotiations, he said, adding the Modi-government remains fully committed to protecting farmers and securing rural livelihoods.

In other free trade agreements (FTA) with the European Union, Australia and the UK, India has not extended any import duty concessions on sensitive agri and

India's agriculture sector is currently protected by moderate to high tariffs or import duties and regulations to shield domestic farmers from unfair competition in the market.

The US agri exports to India were USD 1.6 billion in 2024. Key exports include almonds (in shell, USD 868 million); pistachios (USD 121 million), apples (USD 21 million), ethanol (ethyl alcohol, USD 266 million).

In FY 2025, India's total agricultural exports increased to over USD 51 billion from USD 45.7 billion in 2023-24, with a portion of this going to the US (USD 5 billion). India's total exports in FY25 were USD 437 billion. India aims to reach USD 100 billion in combined exports of agriculture, marine products and food items. —*PTI*

India gets duty free access to US aircraft, aircraft parts

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

India and the United States have agreed on a framework for an interim bilateral trade agreement, aimed at easing market access and boosting two-way commerce, according to a joint statement released on Saturday.

Under the framework, India will receive tariff-free access to certain US aircraft and aircraft parts, along with preferential tariff-rate quotas for automotive components. The two sides also agreed on negotiated outcomes for generic pharmaceuticals and their ingredients. In return, India will reduce or eliminate tariffs on all US industrial goods and a broad range of food and agricultural products, while safeguarding sensitive sectors such as agriculture and dairy.

Both countries committed to addressing long-standing non-tariff barriers, including restrictions affecting US medical devices, information and communication technology goods, and agricultural products.

The framework reaffirms commitment to negotiations on a comprehensive US-India Bilateral Trade Agreement, first proposed in February 2025, which seeks to raise bilateral trade from USD 191 billion to USD 500 billion by 2030.

Following a recent phone call between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump, US tariffs on Indian goods were reduced from 50 per cent to 18 per cent. —*Agencies*

TRADE PACT TO BOOST MARKET ACCESS FOR AMERICAN FARMERS: USTR

NEW YORK, 7 FEB

US President Trump is expanding American farmers and producers' access to one of the largest economies under a trade deal with India, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) said.

The agency, responsible for developing and promoting US foreign trade policies, also said that India has committed to eliminating or lowering tariffs for all US industrial goods and a wide array of agricultural products.

"From tree nuts and dried distillers' grains to fresh and processed fruit, the US-India agreement will provide new market access for American products," the USTR said in a social media post on Friday local time.

US Trade Representative Ambassador Jamieson Greer said the announcement demonstrated the deepening ties between the United States and India as new opportunities are created for farmers and entrepreneurs in both countries.

The White House said the two sides have reached a framework for an interim agreement on reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade. Greener thanked Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal. —*PTI*

TRADE PACT TO OPEN MANY OPPORTUNITIES: BOEING

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Aircraft maker Boeing on Saturday said the India-US interim trade agreement will open multifold opportunities and that the company has always advocated for zero-for-zero tariff approach for the aerospace and defence sector. Under the agreement, tariffs will go down to zero on various goods, including generic pharmaceuticals and aircraft parts.

Boeing India and South Asia President Salil Gupte said, "This deal creates momentum to extend that principle, which would boost industrial growth, strengthen national security, and deliver win-win opportunities for both countries."

Aequs executive chairman and CEO Aravind Melligeri said the lifting of tariffs will lead to more cash flows and enhanced cost competitiveness for the supply chain. —*PTI*

Reliance acquires majority stake in Auz beverage biz

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Reliance Consumer Products Limited (RCPL), the FMCG arm of Reliance Industries, on Saturday announced acquiring a majority stake in Australia-based Goodness Group Global Pty Ltd. The deal includes the 'Better-For-You' beverage business and will allow RCPL to enter Australia and expand overseas.

"Under the strategic partnership, RCPL will help promote Goodness Group's flagship healthy beverage brands like Nexba and PACE, a hydration brand co-created with Australian cricket captain Pat Cummins, across newer markets including India," said a joint statement. The stake size and financial details were not disclosed.

The partnership strengthens RCPL's efforts to build a health-based beverages portfolio and reinforces its position as a fast-emerging global FMCG player from India. RCPL's portfolio includes RasKik and Sun Crush juices, zero-sugar carbonated soft drinks, the herbal-natural brand Shunya and soft drinks brand Campa, and it operates in the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

"With our strong supply chain and distribution capabilities, RCPL will ensure expansion of GGG's brands across newer markets and

> "With our strong supply chain and distribution capabilities, RCPL will ensure expansion of GGG's brands across newer markets and wide availability." RCPL director T Krishnakumar said.

wide availability in India." RCPL Director T Krishnakumar said.

Troy Douglas, Founder, Goodness Group, said: "In RCPL, we have found an incredibly strong and sophisticated partner as part of our evolution as we become a global player in up to 50 Western markets over the next five years. This partnership will provide an opportunity for the business to become the global leader in the 'Better-For-You' category."

Sydney-based Goodness Group Global offers healthier beverages across Australia and 21 other markets, including BISON, GOOD BREKKIE and PACE. —*PTI*

SBI reports record profit of Rs 21,028 crore in Q3

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

State Bank of India (SBI) announced a record standalone profit of Rs 21,028 crore for the December quarter of FY26, marking its highest ever. On a consolidated basis, the bank's profit increased by 13.06 per cent to Rs 21,317 crore, according to a regulatory filing.

The bank's core net interest income rose 9.04 per cent to Rs 45,190 crore from Rs 41,446 crore a year earlier, driven by 15.14 per cent loan growth and a marginal 0.03 per cent compression in the domestic net interest margin, now at

3.12 per cent. Non-interest income grew 15.65 per cent to Rs 8,404 crore during the quarter.

Total expenses increased to Rs 1,08,052 crore from Rs 1,04,917 crore in the same period last year. Deposits grew by 9.02 per cent in October-December. Fresh slippages amounted to Rs 4,458 crore, compared to Rs 3,823 crore in the previous year.

The gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.57 per cent from 1.73 per cent in September. Provisions stood at Rs 4,507 crore, up from Rs 911 crore that was recorded a year earlier.

SBI's capital adequacy ratio was 14.04 per cent, with a core buffer of 10.99 per cent. SBI Chairman C S Setty attributed the profit surge to a Rs 2,200 crore special dividend from SBI MF and increased fee income and recoveries. —*PTI*

NSE board approves its IPO through OFS

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

The board of the National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Friday approved the launch of its long-awaited initial public offering (IPO), paving the way for the country's largest stock exchange to move closer to a public listing.

The proposed IPO will be an entirely offer-for-sale (OFS) by existing shareholders, with no fresh equity issuance, the exchange said in a statement. This means the company will not raise new capital through the public issue, and the proceeds will go to the selling shareholders.

"Considered and approved undertaking an initial public offering (IPO) through an offer for sale by existing shareholders of the company (OFS), for the listing of the equity shares of face value of Re 1 each of the company," NSE said.

As part of the process, the board also approved the reconstitution of its IPO Committee to facilitate and oversee activities related to the public issue.

The revamped committee will be chaired by Tablesh Pandey, a non-independent director.

The move is a significant step in NSE's long pending plan to go public, subject to regulatory approvals and market conditions. —*ANI*

Inflation needs monitoring as new CPI series begins: RBI

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Inflation needs monitoring in 2026-27 before any monetary policy call by the Reserve Bank, as a new Consumer Price Index series is set to begin, SBI Research said.

The CPI series with base year 2024 will be released on 12 February, 2026. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Impleme ntation is revising base years of CPI, GDP and IIP, key indicators for RBI policy-making.

On Friday, the RBI's

Monetary Policy Committee unanimously kept the repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent and retained a neutral stance. Considering GST rationalisation, healthy rabi prospects and benign inflation, GDP growth was revised to 6.9 per cent in Q1 2026-27 and 7 per cent in Q2. CPI inflation for 2025-26 is projected at 2.1 per cent, with Q4 at 3.2 per cent, the slight upward revision reflecting higher precious metal prices.

RBI measures also covered cross-selling, recovery agents and digital fraud, with banking frauds rising from 13,494 in 2022-23 to 23,879 in 2024-25, allowed lending to REITs, supported CPSE monetisation and raised collateral-free MSE loans to Rs 20 lakh. —*PTI*

SEMICON 2.0 ROADMAP SET

2 nanometre Qualcomm chip unveiled

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Union Minister for Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday unveiled a high-tech 2-nanometre chip manufactured by Qualcomm.

The minister underscored the country's rapid progress in building an end-to-end semiconductor ecosystem.

Vaishnaw said the development marks a shift from India's earlier role as a back-office destination to a hub for end-to-end semiconductor product development, from customer product definition through silicon design, tape-out, and validation.

"Our country is making major progress in the semiconductor manufacturing design and getting the entire ecosystem in our country. It's a new industry," he said.

Holding a chip wafer in his

Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw during the inauguration of a new Research and Development facility of Texas Instruments, in Bengaluru —*PTI*

hands, the minister described its capabilities and the precision manufacturing involved in it.

The minister noted that the newly designed wafer contains approximately 20 to 30 billion transistors, with each die--a small square on the wafer--housing nearly 20 billion transistors. He explained that the chip integrates both a CPU and a GPU.

"The end product which comes out of this is this kind of module which comes out, which basically becomes an AI computer on the desktop of any person on the edge, which means within a camera, within a Wi-Fi router, or within a device on any machine or any moving car, automobile, train or aeroplane," he said.

He lauded the Indian semiconductor talent developed under the Semicon mission.

Vaishnaw credited India's growing talent pipeline for reinforcing these technological advancements. Under the Semicon India Mission 1.0, the government set a target to train 85,000 semiconductor professionals. —*ANI*

'Zero-duty entry for gems, diamonds a turning point'

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Indian gem and jewellery industry has welcomed the announcement of zero-duty access for diamonds and coloured gemstones to the US under the Interim Agreement framework, describing it as a significant turning point that will boost the sector.

GJEPC Chairman Kirit Bhansali expressed delight, noting that India's diamond exports had fallen by over 60 per cent last year, from USD 3.64 billion to USD 1.45 billion, due to tariff-related loss of competitiveness.

The US and India announced a framework for an interim trade deal, reducing import duties on various goods, including gems, diamonds, pharmaceuticals, and aircraft parts, to promote bilateral trade and Make in India.

Bhansali stated that jewellery duties had been cut to 18 per cent, providing immediate relief, with expectations of full zero-duty treatment for diamonds and coloured gemstones once the agreement is finalised. He also highlighted efforts to include laboratory-grown diamonds and synthetic gemstones in the US tariff exemption list.

All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) Chairman Rajesh Rokde said the zero-duty access would give Indian exporters unprecedented market entry, strengthening global competitiveness and boosting margins.

GJC Vice Chairman Avinash Gupta emphasised that SMEs and family-run businesses would benefit significantly, creating jobs and increasing exports across related industries in the country. —*PTI*

Bold Faheem propels Pak to win over Netherlands

Romario Shepherd takes first hat-trick of T20 WC

COLOMBO, 7 FEB

All-rounder Faheem Ashraf emerged as the hero for Pakistan, hammering 29 off 11 balls in a stunning late assault to snatch a dramatic three-wicket win over the Netherlands in the T20 World Cup opener here on Saturday.

Chasing 148 for a win, Pakistan were 90 for 2 at the halfway stage but lost wickets in a heap as they were 114 for 7 in 16.1 overs, needing 34 more runs.

It looked all but over for Pakistan at that stage, but walking in at number 8, Ashraf, who was dropped on 7, had other plans. Needing 29 runs from the last two overs, Ashraf hit three sixes and one four off Logan Van Beek and finished off the match with a four in the final over as Pakistan reached 148 for 7 in 19.3 overs.

Faheem Ashraf –PTI

All-rounder Faheem Ashraf admitted his heart rate was fluctuating during the fag end of Pakistan's nervy yet successful run chase against the Netherlands in the T20 World Cup opener here on Saturday, but said he was confident he "could take down whatever runs in one over".

Max O'Dowd dropped Ashraf when he was on seven in the second ball of the 19th over, and perhaps that cost the match for the Dutch.Pakistan's build-up was dominated by off-the-field matters after their Board decided to boycott the February 15 marquee match against India here, though they had beaten a depleted Australia 3-0 in the home T20I series.

Pakistan 148 for 7 (Farhan 47, Faheem 29*, van Meekeren 2-20, Dutt 2-33) beat Netherlands 147 (Edwards 37, de Leede 30, Mirza 3-24, Ayub 2-7, Abrar 2-23, Nawaz 2-38) by three wickets.

Shimron Hetmyer –PTI

WEST INDIES BEGIN T20 WC WITH A WIN OVER SCOTLAND

West Indies pacer Romario Shepherd picked up a hat-trick during its T20 World Cup 2026 group-stage fixture against Scotland on Saturday at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

The pacer removed Matthew Cross, Michael Leask, and Oliver Davidson on consecutive deliveries in the 17th over. Shepherd then went on to take a fourth wicket in the over by sending back Safyaan Sharif.

Romario Shepherd grabbed five wickets after Shimron Hetmyer hit a fiery fifty as two-time champions West Indies began their T20 World Cup campaign with a comfortable 35-run victory over late entrants Scotland here on Saturday.Invited to bat, Hetmyer blazed away to 36-ball-64, notching up the fastest fifty by a West Indian in the tournament. West Indies 182 for 5 in 20 overs. Scotland 147 all out in 18.5 overs

Romario Shepherd –PTI

PCB WRITES TO ICC TO INVOKE 'FORCE MAJEURE'

LAHORE, 7 FEB

The ICC has sought an explanation from Pakistan on how the 'Force Majeure' clause can be invoked to justify the team's refusal to play the T20 World Cup match against India after the PCB tried to wriggle out of the situation by putting the onus on its government. Having received the world body's formal communication, the PCB initiated further discussions.

So what is Force Majeure?

Force majeure is a contractual provision that excuses a party from fulfilling its obligations due to extraordinary events beyond its control, such as war, natural disasters, government actions, or public emergencies.

For the clause to apply, the affected party must demonstrate that the event was unforeseeable, unavoidable, and that it took all reasonable steps to mitigate the impact. exemptions before opting for non-participation.

ICC seeks proof of mitigation

The Pakistan government had announced that its team would boycott only the India fixture to support Bangladesh, who were shown the door for refusing to play in India due to their "security concerns.

—*PTI*

ICC T20 WC MATCHES TOMMORROW

NZ eye all-around improvement against tricky Afghanistan

An underwhelming New Zealand will be hoping to rediscover their explosive game against a dangerous Afghanistan in the opening Group D match of the ICC T20 World Cup here on ***Sunday 11 AM***. The Kiwis went through a rather unstable preparatory phase ahead of the ICC showpiece, going 1-4 down to India, and Afghanistan is no less a threat. Ferguson will have to play a lead role to keep Afghanistan on the back foot here, along with Santner and leg-spinner Ish Sodhi.

Brook hopes focus shifts to on-field action as England face Nepal

An embattled Harry Brook will hope England hit the top gear and the focus shifts from the incident at a Wellington club to cricket when the two-time champions take on Nepal in their T20 World Cup opener, here on ***Sunday 3 PM***. Brook is at the helm of a formidable England side that has had a successful run in the T20I format, but talk around the camp has also centred on the incident at the nightclub, where the English captain was reportedly involved in an altercation with a bouncer during a night out on the pre-Ashes tour.

Tricky opening tie awaits undercooked SL in form of unpredictable Ireland

An undercooked Sri Lanka would look to put behind a disappointing preparation and dish out a solid effort when they take on an unpredictable Ireland in their opening Group B match of the T20 World Cup in front of home fans here on ***Sunday 7 PM***. Sri Lanka didn't have the best of preparations for the showpiece they are co-hosting with India, as they were whitewashed 0-3 by England in a home T20 series, which was the final tune-up to the tournament.

–PTI

Weightlifting Nationals: Raja takes 65kg gold

MODINAGAR, 7 FEB

Tamil Nadu's M Raja outclassed a field that included Commonwealth Games champion Jeremy Lalrinnunga to clinch the men's 65kg gold medal at the National Weightlifting Championships here on Saturday. The 26-year-old Raja, a Commonwealth Championships silver medallist, lifted a combined 302kg (130kg snatch + 172kg clean and jerk) to finish comfortably ahead of the field. Charu Pesi of the Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) secured the silver medal with a total of 296kg (129kg + 167kg). Mizoram's Jeremy, the 2018 Youth Olympic champion, endured an off-colour outing, failing three attempts, including two in the snatch, and finished with an overall effort of 295kg (133kg + 167kg) to settle for bronze.—*PTI*

KOCHHAR FIRES COURSE RECORD TO TAKE LEAD IN THE PHILIPPINES

MANILA, 7 FEB

India's Karandeep Kochhar roared back in the third round with a course record to take the third-round lead in the Philippine Golf Championship here on Saturday.

Kochhar, who recently won in Egypt and his own country at the IGPL Tour, celebrated his return to the Asian Tour with a bogey-free 65 that had seven birdies. With rounds of 74-69-65 he is now 8-under and leads by two.

Breaking par on the East Course – respected for being one of the most challenging courses in the region – is an outstanding achievement.

"The way this course has been playing for the past two days and today, with a little bit of rain, which was there for maybe seven, eight holes, I would say I think it was probably one of my finest performances," Kochhar said.

"Because it's not easy out there to score, the greens are tiny, they can get quick if you're on the wrong side of the hole. I just played really well tee to green, that's been the mantra this week, just try to hit as many greens as possible," he added.

Four players, South African Ian Snyman (70), Travis Smyth (71) from Australia, Thailand's Sarut Vongchaisit (71) and Korea's Wooyoung Cho (71), share second place and are two strokes behind.

The next best Indian after Kochhar was rookie Shubham Jaglan (77-70-69), with five birdies against two bogeys, who was T-17.

Ajeetesh Sandhu (72-75-74) had a rare quintuple bogey of five-over on a single hole but still made the cut at 5-over total and was T-61. —*PTI*

RANJI QUARTERFINALS

Pacers help Mumbai gain upper hand against Karnataka on Day 2

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

After a batting debacle that let Mumbai down in the first innings of the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal against Karnataka, not many imagined that the 42-time champion side would eventually stage a comeback. But Mohit Avasthi (4/27) and Tushar Deshpande (4/33) once again proved why the Mumbai cricketers are called 'khadoos'.

True to their reputation, the seasoned fast bowlers refused to give up and bundled out

Tushar Deshpande –PTI

Karnataka for just 173. Cruising at 110 for two at one point, Karnataka looked set for a big total before Deshpande and Avasthi made the most of the conditions at the MCA-BKC ground on Saturday to trigger a collapse.

Karnataka lost eight wickets for just 63 runs and folded in just 127 minutes to allow Mumbai to bounce back in the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal.

Coming on the back of a five-wicket haul against Delhi in the last group-stage game, Avasthi maintained a good line and length, and unsettled the Karnataka middle order, before Deshpande tightened the noose.Despite wickets tumbling at the other end, Mayank Agarwal (92, 134b, 14x4, 1x6) did put up a fight and challenged the Mumbai bowlers. —*PTI*

Man United beats Tottenham to bag 4th straight win

MANCHESTER, 7 FEB

Bryan Mbeumo and Bruno Fernandes scored as Manchester United defeated 10-man Tottenham Hotspur 2-0 in their Premier League clash at Old Trafford on Saturday, tightening their grip on fourth place and piling the pressure on Thomas Frank.

United move to 44 points from 25 games, four points ahead of Chelsea in fifth, though having played a game more. Tottenham remain in 14th with 29 points from 25 games.Mbeumo gave United the lead on 38 minutes when a well-worked corner routine created a shooting chance for the Cameroon international, before Fernandes added a second with 10 minutes remaining.

Tottenham lost captain Cristian Romero to a straight red card after 29 minutes following a reckless tackle on United midfielder Casemiro, deepening the selection woes for his side, who are already without a host of players through injury.

United are unbeaten in their last seven league games and have won all four since Michael Carrick returned as manager. —*PTI*

Davis Cup: Nagal fights back

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Sumit Nagal mounted a strong comeback after being bageled in the first set but could not sustain the momentum as he lost the opening singles to Netherlands' Guy de Ouden, leaving India trailing 0-1 in the Davis Cup Qualifiers Round 1 tie here Saturday.

After battling hard for two hours and 28 minutes, Nagal lost 0-6, 6-,4 3-6.The onus to bring India back in the tie is now on Dhakshineswar Suresh, who is up against Dutch number one and world number 73 Jesper de Jong.

Nagal was blown away in the first set as De Ouden dropped just one point on his serve and wrapped it up in 38 minutes.The Dutchman held serve without losing a point in the opening game and immediately put Nagal under pressure.From 40-0 up, Nagal conceded his serve with two double faults and a string of unforced errors as De Ouden's deep returns exposed the lack of sting in the Indian's strokes.

Keeping the points short and reading the conditions well, De Ouden mixed his game smartly, even using serve-and-volley to open up a 3-0 lead. —*PTI*

–PTI

Asian C'ship 2026: Elavenil wins 10m air rifle gold

MODINAGAR, 7 FEB

Elavenil Valarivan defended her title while Meghana Sajjanar grabbed a bronze medal in the women's 10m air rifle event at the ongoing Asian Championship for rifle and pistol events at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi on Saturday. Elavenil bagged her third Asian Championship gold in 10m air rifle with a score of 252.0, ahead of Japan's Misaki Nobata (251.5) and Meghana (229.5). Arya Borse (209.0), the third Indian in the final, finished fourth. Elavenil (633.7), Arya (630.3), and Meghana (628.6) also helped India bag the team gold with a combined score of 1892.6 in the qualification round. Shreya Agrawal (632.0) and Sonam Uttam Maskar (631.9) also had a good day in the office as the marks-women finished third and fourth, respectively, in the qualification round.—*PTI*

India beats B'desh to win SAFF U-19 Women's Championship 2026

NEPAL, 7 FEB

India pulled off a dominant performance against Bangladesh to reclaim the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship title, winning 4-0 in the final at the Pokhara Rangasala in Nepal on Saturday.

Captain Julan Nongmaithen, who led India's under-17 side to AFC Asian Cup qualification earlier this year, opened the scoring after receiving a pass from Pritika Barman and steering it into the net.

Alva Devi Senjam, who had delivered the cross for Barman in the build-up, continued to be a menace in the final third. Just after the hour mark, she earned a penalty, and Elizabeth Lakra made it 2-0 with a calm finish from the spot. Bangladesh, the defending champion, looked visibly rattled, and India piled on the pressure, finding a third goal by pressing high up the pitch. Pearl Fernandes, the tournament's second-highest goalscorer with four strikes, stole the ball off goalkeeper Mst Yearzan Begum and tucked it into the net. Bangladesh looked for a way back, but India struck again late on. Senjam's low cross into the box found Anwita Raghuraman, who guided the ball into the net to make it 4-0 seven minutes from time. —*PTI*

PTI

BOXAM ELITE 2026

Lovlina storms into 75kg women's final

LA NUCIA, 7 FEB

Twelve Indians, including eight women and four men, will compete for gold on the final day of BOXAM Elite International 2026, following another session full of assured performances on Friday.

Leading the men's charge was Sachin (60kg), who extended his brilliant run with another dominant win over England's Jack Dryden.

Over in the women's section, Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) stormed through to the finals with a unanimous victory over Wales' Rosie Eccles. India (12) is the most well-represented nation in Saturday's finals ahead of heavyweights Kazakhstan (11), Ukraine (5), and host Spain (4) and is assured of at least one gold, with the Elite Women 54kg final being an all-Indian affair.

India's women continued their strong showing with commanding semifinal wins across divisions, headlined by the confirmation of a gold in the 54kg category, where Preeti and Poonam will face off for the title. Elsewhere, Manju Rani (48kg), Nitu (51kg), Priya (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70kg), and Naina (80kg) all advanced to the finals with emphatic victories, underlining India's depth and consistency across weight classes.

In the men's competition, India added further finalists through dominant displays from Deepak (70kg), Akash (75kg), and Ankush (80kg). Deepak produced one of the session's standout moments by forcing a first-round RSC against Kazakhstan's World Boxing Cup Finals' silver medallist Nurbek Mursal, while Akash and Ankush negotiated tough bouts against Kazakh opponents to seal their places in Saturday's gold-medal contests. India's campaign also saw several boxers finish on the podium with bronze medals after falling at the semifinal stage. —*PTI*

Leeds beat Forest and take a giant step towards PL status

LEEDS, 7 FEB

Leeds United scored twice in four minutes in a dominant first half, then added a third soon after halftime in beating Nottingham Forest 3-1 for a massive boost in its fight against Premier League relegation on Friday.

Leeds' fourth Friday night win in a row lifted it nine points clear of the relegation zone and equal on points with the two clubs above it, Crystal Palace and Tottenham Hotspur.

Forest's four-game unbeaten league run came to an unceremonious end, and it remained in 17th place.

Leeds started the better side and led after 26 minutes.

With the Forest defense static, Jayden Bogle ran onto a superb through ball from Ilia Gruev and poked it under the hesitant keeper.

Four minutes later, Noah Okafor broke a 16-game scoring drought to make it 2-0. But much of the credit went to James Justin, who started the move on the right flank and saw his shot parried into the path of the former Napoli and AC Milan winger, who made no mistake. —*PTI*